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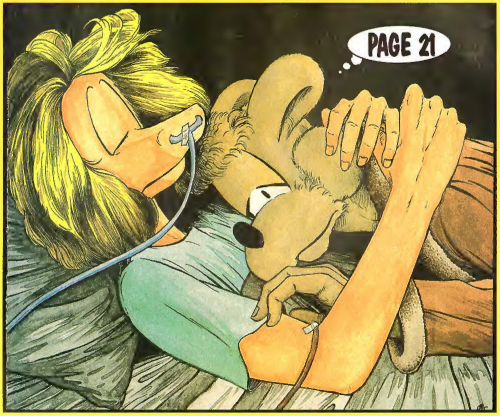

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WORD BALLOONS

Do Not Go Gently

Well, he's gone. History. Expired. Had it. He's pushing up super-tulips. Dead. Dead as a super-duck. Living-impaired. Erased. Inert. Defunct. Supremely inanimate. Absent without life. Missing from *Action*.

In short, in brief, in memoriam, the Man of Steel has bit the big one. Teed off on the great golf course in the sky. Left on the last train to Smallville (and he won't meet you at the station). We don't have Kal-El to kick around anymore. Even if we *could* kick him around. And hey, if you weren't careful about that, you could dent your foot.

Amid much fanfare, breathless mainstream media reports and massive sales, Superman is dead. That's dead. As in better dead than unread. D-E-A-D. Well, not exactly, of course. For lotsa reasons. Want a few?

Let's try—the mythical? Superman can *never* die. Like certain other popular characters—Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan, Batman, Kirk & Spock, Luke Skywalker—he has transcended his own adventures. Superman has become modern myth, a hero who will outlive his creators, past, present and future, for as long as kids read comics (or something like them) and storytellers can sit by the light of the campfire and pound out a script on their word processors.

Gosh, that sounds *so* serious. What about neatness? If Superman's dead, who's gonna dust the Fortress of Solitude? It isn't gonna be Krypto. He's a busy super-dog. So many cars, so little time.

The religious: Well, Superman *is* Jor-El's only begotten son, sent to Earth to save him (and us?). Academicians, religious scholars and people who've swiped a Gideon Bible from a Holiday Inn at least once to read (or perhaps to look at the pictures) know that. His being dead is an incredible stroke of good luck, because it merely sets the stage for the next phase of religious comparison: The Resurrection. Lord, I can imagine those doctoral dissertations revving up at universities everywhere at the very thought ("Quasi-Crypto-Religious Imagery and the Kryptonian Krucifixion" or perhaps "World's Finest Team-up: Superman & Jesus Christ: One & the Same or Just Good Friends?").

Merchandising. Deceased superheroes—with the exception of, say, Elvis, Marilyn Monroe and James Dean—don't sell stuff. Superman underwear won't look all that good modeled on a super-corpse. If Supes is extinctoroonie, who's gonna sell all those toys, T-shirts and such? Jimmy Olsen, Superman's Pal? Would you buy a used car from *him*? And will anything even be made? Or does the Licensing Department kiss all those super-sheckels *adios*?

The medium itself. This is a *comic book*, remember? Anyone—especially the bad guys—can die and show up hale and hearty and alive just a few issues down the line. (This is, needless to say, yet another area in which comics are infinitely superior to real life, where if doesn't seem to work the same way.) Alfred, Professor X, Gwen Stacy, Dr. Doom, the Joker and Count Dracula have all been really dead now and again in comics. And they all came back. (Now if somebody could only do something about Aunt May. And that Robin kid. All we need is one lousy little phone number. It worked once.)

Corporate. Warner Communications, which owns DC Comics, is the self-styled master of "synergy"—as evidenced by such publicity bonanzas as Ice-T's law enforcement paeans and Madonna's barely covered nod to non-fiction. How could they let this opportunity go by without, like, doing a rap song or an overpriced book about it? And what about those super-sheckels I mentioned? Does anyone truly believe Warners will let Superman, a corporate moneymaker, stay deceased? If so, I have some swampland in New Jersey I'll be happy to sell you. At wholesale. (Look at it this way: Would Disney off Mickey Mouse? Without a *really* good reason? Like if he finally went mad and pushed Donald Duck out a window? Murder most fowl!)

Respect. The "Death of Superman" does provide an intriguing creative twist to continue challenging the talented writers and artists charting his adventures under the stewardship of Editor Mike Carlin. It's a brilliant marketing ploy that has caught the mainstream's press attention and focused the spotlight once again on the Man of Steel. And it's a revitalizing master stroke that should further ignite the interest of readers present, past and future, bringing back many onetime readers who remember an immortal hero.

Finally, there's one overpowering reason why Superman *won't* stay dead. It's common sense. We, the fans who've bought and read and loved his comics adventures for more than a half-century, just won't *let* him be dead.

All together now, let's chant and clap our hands and then chant again. "I do believe in Superman. I *do*. I **do**."

He'll be back.

—David McDonnell/Editor

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COMICS SCENE RETURNS with *Batman*'s **Jerry Robinson**...and more in **COMICS SCENE #32, on sale February 23, 1993.**

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All entries must be received in the STARLOG offices no later than February 1, 1993. A random postcard drawing will then be conducted, with prizes sent out as available. Please note: No responsibility is assumed for any lost, misdirected or late entries and any lost, misdirected or damaged-in-mail prizes.

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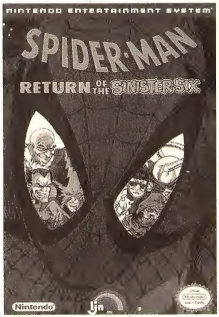

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...Having seen several letters on your letters page asking for information about *Legends of the Super-Heroes*, I thought I would write and give your readers some information about the specials.

There were two *Legends of the Super-Heroes* specials on NBC in 1978. Both featured Adam West and Burt Ward reprising their old roles, as well as a variety of other heroes played by actors who were no-names then and now: Flash, Green Lantern, Hawkman, Black Canary, Huntress and Captain Marvel. Superman was not used because his rights were tied up in the first film, and Wonder Woman was unavailable because her series was on another network at the time. Elderly superhero Retired Man, played by William Schallert, was also in both specials. Villains used in both specials included Sinestro, comically portrayed by Charlie Callas; The Weather Wizard, equally camped-up by Jeff Altman and Dr. Sivana, played by longtime animated cartoon voice actor Howard Morris (who also did the voice for the Prankster on last year's Superman cartoons). It also featured Mordru, Giganta and Solomon Grundy.

The first of the two specials was called *The Challenge*. The super-villains, joined in this first special by TV *Batman* alumnus Frank Gorshin as the Riddler, were plotting to use Dr. Sivana's Doomsday Machine to destroy the world (motivations for destroying their own planet unknown). They sent the superheroes (who, incidentally, did *not* use the name "Justice League" or any other super-team name in these specials) riddle-clues that led them to spots where the super-villains kept them busy while the Doomsday Machine ticked away. Solomon Grundy damaged the Batmobile, then captured Hawkman and Black Canary; Weather Wizard kept the Dynamic Duo occupied; Sinestro and Green Lantern squared off in a duel of rings; and the Riddler got Captain Marvel on his psychiatrist's couch. Finally, after getting information from a lady in a phone booth (played by later *Night Court* cast member Marsha Warfield), the superheroes found the villains' hideout. Dr. Sivana tricked them into drinking a potion which temporarily removed their super-powers, but then the villains accidentally drank some, too. The heroes trounced the villains in a battle royal, and the Doomsday Machine was halted at the last second.

The second special was called *The Roast*. The superheroes had turned out to be roasted by their arch-enemies, fellow superheroes and family members. The Riddler was gone from this episode, but Ruth Buzzi stepped in as Captain Marvel's nemesis Aunt Minerva. Character actress Pat Carroll [Ursula in *Little Mermaid*] played Esther Hall, Hawkman's mother; gossip columnist Rhoda Rooter reported on the upcoming marriage of the Atom to Giganta; black superhero Ghetto Man appeared; and super-villains Sinestro, Weather Wizard, Solomon Grundy, Dr. Sivana and Mordru each got their crack at the heroes. Ed McMahon was master of ceremonies for this auspicious occasion.

The specials were played completely for comedy; in fact, they made the *Batman* series look like a documentary. The conclusion of the second special was a song-and-dance routine by Mordru, following which he was hit in the face with a bat-pie. But as comedies, they were quite funny and those who don't mind seeing their favorite characters turned into stand-up comedians would enjoy them.

Dale J. Roberts
2648 W. Robino
Wilmington, DE 19808

...Looking at the cast and guest stars for the animated *Batman* series, it looks as if this will be the most ambitious cartoon series since *The Simpsons*. I don't think there has been this much vocal talent in one place since the old days of Orson Welles' *Mercury Radio Theatre*. It's interesting that some of the vocal talent comes from people who had something to do with other comic book characters.

There's Helen Slater, who played Supergirl; Roddy McDowall, who played the Bookworm on the *Batman* TV series; Mark Hamill, who played the Trickster on *The Flash*; Bob Hastings, who did the voice of Superboy on the *Superman* TV cartoon of the late '60s; John Vernon, who voiced Iron Man in his cartoon; and Dick Gautier, who played Batman in a commercial back in the '60s...and I'm sure that this is only the tip of the iceberg.

If there is going to be a Batgirl, there will absolutely *have* to be a Killer Moth. After all, he was responsible for the creation of Batgirl.

Willie Holmes
8453 S. Saginaw Avenue
Chicago, IL 60617

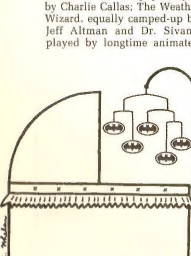
...Pat Jankiewicz's "Animated Knights" article in COMICS SCENE #29 was awesome! *Batman: The Animated Series* was entertaining and realistic.

When Kevin Conroy did the voice of Batman, he sounded like Michael Keaton. He did a great job.

Since this series is going to be on home video like Warner Bros. said, 65 episodes could be released in 13 tapes, because there might be five episodes in one, which is my guess.

On an unrelated topic, past animated incarnations of Batman from the '60s, '70s and '80s were in *The Adventures of Batman and Robin* as part of the *Superman/Batman Hour* in 1968, *Super Friends* from 1973 to 1986 and *The New Adventures of Batman* in 1977.

To video collectors and comic buffs, I think it would be a great idea if *all* of the Caped Crusader's past cartoons were available on home video sometime in the future, as well as the



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120 episodes of the *Batman* TV series from 1966-1968, complete and uncut.

If you video collectors want all the above shows released on home video, write and ask Warner Home Video. Here's the address: Warner Home Video, Inc., 4000 Warner Boulevard, Burbank, CA 91522.

Richard Irving
Pawtucket, RI

It's highly unlikely that the animated Batman *video releases would feature five episodes per volume. After all, most animated series on video include only one or two episodes on each tape. Also, since the Adam West* Batman *TV series was a 20th Century Fox TV production, Warner Home Video may not possess rights to that series. For more on* Batman, *see page 17.*

...Oppression of rights is a long-time battle that the world at large has fought hard to overcome, yet the sad circumstance of people in power pushing to keep a tight rein over the status quo never seems to disappear, does it? There are still those who seek to keep the rights of others, be it religious or otherwise, under firm control. And in the comics medium, this action is still prevalent, much to the dismay of creators.

The institution of a creator-controlled comics company like Image Comics from Malibu Graphics is *long* overdue. In the beginning, everyone paid it no mind, thinking it wouldn't go anywhere. Marvel and DC thought they would have the last laugh on the creators who left them, thinking they would fall on their faces. It would now be a wise assumption that they were wrong—dead wrong.

The Image Universe is surpassing everyone's greatest expectations. It's picking up greater sales than anyone believed. Its popularity is growing. The "upstart" creators seem to be having the last laugh, much to Marvel's chagrin.

It was said from the beginning that the people involved with the new creation that is Image held no animosity towards their former employers, only a desire to secure better rights and freedoms for all creators in the business. But now, it would seem as though the heat from the sales of the Image titles are causing Marvel and DC to re-evaluate their own current operations and possible futures. No one ever seriously thought that Image would unseat the powerblocks in the business. Now, it would appear they may actually be doing just that. At any rate, whatever heat Image is making, the "Big Two" are feeling it. This might explain why Marvel is treating some of the biggest and best professionals in the medium like dirt.

It's known now that both Jim Valentino and Dale Keown were *fired* from their Marvel projects due to their association with Image. Both were in the prime of their careers with their projects, their talents unmistakably the reasons for their series' success. Now, perhaps I might be wrong, but is that not what *freelancers* are allowed to do? Creators have wandered in between both Marvel and DC for years, some even working simultaneously, and all without incident. Now comes Image, and there's suddenly hell to pay! For what constructive reason? I don't buy the excuses given to the public by the companies for their actions.

Obviously, the positive response to Image is creating friction in some tender spots. Is it a matter of fear? Do the "Big Two" see Image, with its creative freedoms, as a possible formation of some type of a *union* within the business? Clearly, that's something they wouldn't want, but might have to embrace one day, like it or not.

The firings of key professionals like Valentino and

Photos: NBC

WANTED! MORE READERS LIKE the *Legends of the Super-Heroes*. Among them: Dr. Sivana (Howard Morris), the Riddler (Frank Gorshin), Batman (Adam West), Robin (Burt Ward) and Retired Man (William Schallert).

Keown seems to be an outward effect of the pressure Image is bringing down. In 10 to 20 years, who knows what it will have grown to? What creators, amateur and professional alike, would want to work for either of the "Big Two" when they can have creative freedom and *respect*, as both creators and human beings with feelings and emotions, doing work for Image?

Comics are fun, but it's big business, make no mistake. The gauntlet has been thrown down. Now it's time to see who'll go the distance.

Mark R. Daniels
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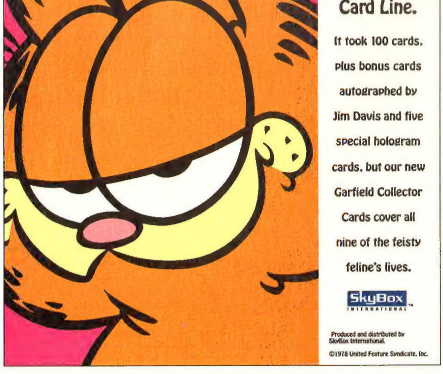
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STRANGE interlude

Art: Frank Brunner All Dr. Strange Characters & Art Copyright 1965, 1974, 1992 Marvel Entertainment Group

Marvel's Sorcerer Supreme may soon be making movie magic.

By MARC SHAPIRO & PAT JANKIEWICZ

Oscar-winning director Francis Ford Coppola, the man behind *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now*, is known for many things. But there's one thing most people aren't aware of: As a youth, he was a comics fan, reading the likes of *Green Lantern*, *Justice Society*, *Captain Marvel* and *Batman*. He also has specific plans for another comics character. "I would like to produce *Dr. Strange*," Coppola declares. "We're currently getting it ready."

Dr. Strange is, of course, the Sorcerer Supreme of the Earth dimension, Marvel Comics' mystical hero created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko for *Strange Tales* #110 in 1962. The pro-

jected film is a co-production of Coppola's American Zoetrope company and Columbia Pictures.

"We're basically in the process of acquiring the rights to the character from Marvel," reports Coppola's son, Roman Coppola. "We're in the earliest fetal beginnings of development. No writer is formally attached to a script, nobody has been cast and no special effects people have been contacted. It's just too early."

Roman Coppola has a very special interest in *Dr. Strange*. The second unit director and special FX maven of *Dracula* and producer of the science-fiction comedy *The Spirit of '76*. Coppola will direct *Dr. Strange*.

He's intelligent, soft-spoken and very direct about his plans for the Master of the Mystic Arts. "The starting point would be the Ditko/Lee stuff—we would go back to that and tell Dr. Strange's origin, and have his first adventure as the Sorcerer Supreme of the Earth dimension."

There have been attempts to conjure up *Dr. Strange* on screen before. Phil (*The Twilight Zone*) DeGuere directed a 1978 TV movie/series pilot starring Peter Hooten as Strange. "I never saw it, but I'm trying to get ahold of it," Coppola notes. "Many people are familiar with it, but have never seen it. I would *really* like to see it."

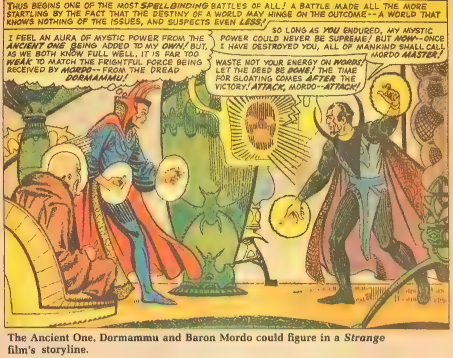
In recent years, New World Pictures had plotted a *Dr. Strange* scripted by *Back to the Future*'s Bob Gale. The project was never made, though *Repo Man*'s Alex Cox was announced as a possible director.

Executive producer Fred Fuchs, who worked with both Coppolas on *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, claims that "Francis and Roman will collaboate very closely on this film." Fuchs says their Dr. Strange will take on the tone of "a James Bond of the occult. It'll be an action-adventure movie that will take place in an arena that has never been addressed before."

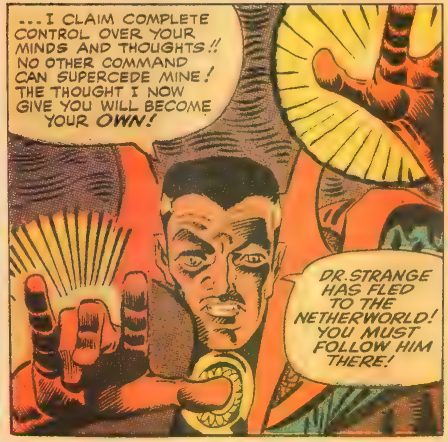
As for who would play the surgeon-turned-mystic mage, Roman Coppola laughs. "Good question! This is *total* speculation, but just for fun, I think Richard Gere is a dead ringer for Dr. Strange, with his silver temples. He's handsome and dashing. Mel Gibson would also make a good Doc Strange. They're A-list actors, so I don't know how conceivable this is. One person who would be fantastic as Strange," he says with an optimistic smile, "would be Robert De Niro!"

Coppola elaborates with fragments of the proposed film's storyline. "I'm planning on sticking very close to the comic book interpretation of Dr. Strange. Certain liberties will be taken and the whole idea will be played very straight."

He also sees the doctor as a franchise. "It's so early at this point, but I think it would be an FX-oriented, occult James Bond movie. You probably want to use key characters like the Ancient One, Dormammu, Mordo and Clea. As I think about it, those are the characters that I would use."


THUS BEGINS ONE OF THE MOST SPELLBINDING BATTLES OF ALL! A BATTLE MADE ALL THE MORE STARTLING BY THE FACT THAT THE DESTINY OF A WORLD MAY HINGE ON THE OUTCOME--A WORLD THAT KNOWS NOTHING OF THE ISSUES, AND SUSPECTS EVEN LESS!
I FEEL AN AURA OF MYSTIC POWER FROM THE ANCIENT ONE BEING ADDED TO MY OWN! BUT, AS WE BOTH KNOW FULL WELL, IT IS FAR TOO WEAK TO MATCH THE FRIGHTFUL FORCE BEING RECEIVED BY MORDO--FROM THE DREAD DORMAMMU!
SO LONG AS YOU ENDURED, MY MYSTIC POWER COULD NEVER BE SUPREME! BUT NOW--ONCE I HAVE DESTROYED YOU, ALL OF MANKIND SHALL CALL MORDO MASTER!
WASTE NOT YOUR ENERGY ON MORDO! LET THE DEED BE DONE! THE TIME FOR GLOATING COMES AFTER THE VICTORY! ATTACK, MORDO--ATTACK!
Art: Steve Ditko

The Ancient One, Dormammu and Baron Mordo could figure in a *Strange* film's storyline.


...I CLAIM COMPLETE CONTROL OVER YOUR MINDS AND THOUGHTS!! NO OTHER COMMAND CAN SUPERCEDE MINE! THE THOUGHT I NOW GIVE YOU WILL BECOME YOUR OWN!
DR. STRANGE HAS FLED TO THE NETHERWORLD! YOU MUST FOLLOW HIM THERE!
Art: Steve Ditko

Longtime fan Roman Coppola may conjure up Stan Lee & Steve Ditko's Dr. Strange on the movie screen.

Coppola believes his approach to making *Dr. Strange* may avoid the pitfalls that many comics characters have fallen prey to on their way to the screen.

"Dr. Strange is a *totally* comic-book character. But we won't make the mistake of attempting to justify the absurdity of a superhero running around in a costume. What we will do is play up the fantastic in a totally realistic manner," Roman Coppola says. "That's the approach I'm planning on taking with *Dr. Strange*."

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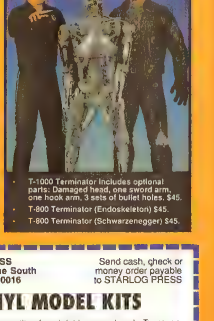

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BEANSOUP

Larry Marder cooks up modern myth, more or less, in his "Tales of the Beanworld."

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

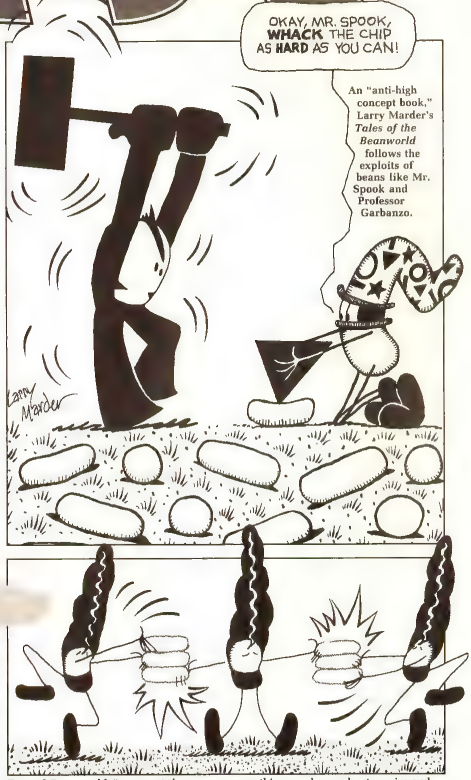
"You can't describe *Tales of the Beanworld*. You have to experience it," says writer/artist Larry Marder.

The creator of Beanworld -which is billed as "a most peculiar comic book experience"—says it's easier to read than describe. "*Beanworld*'s biggest problem all along has been that it fails the 'flip test.' When you don't know what a book is and you're at the shelves or comic racks, you pick it up, flip through it and go, 'That's cool art. I think I'll try it.' If you flip through *Beanworld*, you'll go, 'It looks like *Gummi Bears*!' You have to sit down with it and say, 'I am prepared, and I want to empty my brain and just go along with whatever this guy's about to give me.' And if you can make it through the first five pages, chances are if you like it, you're in it for life."

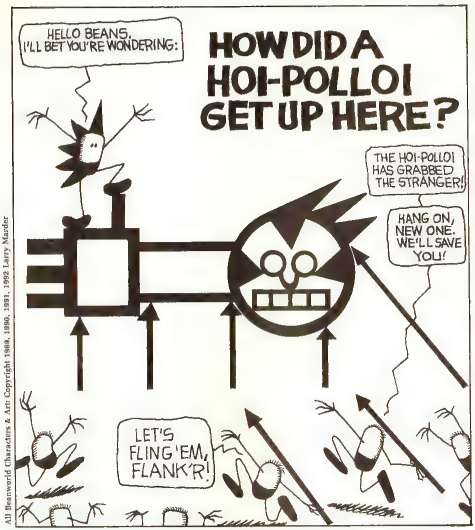
Tales of the Beanworld doesn't look like *any* other comic book, and its stars—including Beanish, Professor Garbanzo and Mr. Spook—are as far removed from superheroes and other comics characters as possible.

"It's difficult to describe," Marder admits, "and that has always been a part of the problem in marketing it. [Eclipse editor] cat yronwode calls it 'an ecological romance.' I always say that it's an epic about a tribe of beans and their obsession with maintaining their food chain—which *sounds* boring and usually puts people to sleep right then and there.

"The problem is, it's completely opposite of the Hollywood 'high concept.' Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles need no explanation. Batman needs no explanation. Superman needs no explanation. *Beanworld* needs about 20 paragraphs! It's an 'anti-high concept' book."


OKAY, MR. SPOOK, WHACK THE CHIP AS HARD AS YOU CAN!
An "anti-high concept book," Larry Marder's *Tales of the Beanworld* follows the exploits of beans like Mr. Spook and Professor Garbanzo.
Larry Marder

To read *Beanworld*, "you must throw away everything you know about comics and start over again," says creator Marder.


HELLO BEANS, I'LL BET YOU'RE WONDERING:
HOW DID A HOI-POLLOI GET UP HERE?
THE HOI-POLLOI HAS GRABBED THE STRANGER!
HANG ON, NEW ONE. WE'LL SAVE YOU!
LET'S FLING 'EM, FLANK'R!

All Beanworld Characters & Art: Copyright 1988, 1990, 1991, 1992 Larry Marder

Beanish, the artist bean who broke out, did break into Eclipse Comics' *Total Eclipse* mini-series, tipping the balance of power.

All Beanworld Art & Photos. Courtesy Larry Marder

Says Marder (with wife Cory, the inspiration for Dreamishness). "*Beanworld* is one of those books where people are not neutral."

Marder isn't even sure that he can talk *X-Men* fans into trying *Tales of the Beanworld*, but he has developed different strategies.

"My basic tool has always been to give them their first comic free, to form their own opinions," he says. "That has worked pretty well. I just tell them that *Beanworld* is an exciting, environmentally-oriented comic, without being preachy. There are concepts in there that you won't find in any other comic, but it's still fun. More than any other comic you're going to come into contact with, you must come to it completely prepared for the exact opposite of what you were used to.

"I mean, most comics are art-driven, and the story is secondary. *Beanworld* is *all* story. The art is almost as minimal as you can get without getting into Matt Feazell's stick figures. It's very two-dimensional. Therefore, you must throw away everything you know about comics and start over again. You have to learn a new language. There's a map that you can track all of the activity with, and a glossary which will help you with all of the new terms. I always say Beanworld isn't a place; it's a process. There's a process of how their food chain works and their constant maintenance of their food chain—when it becomes unbalanced, which is practically every other issue, they have to try to fix and maintain it. That's where *all* of the adventure happens."

Readers and potential readers usually have strong feelings about the title, says Marder. "*Beanworld* is one of those books where people are not neutral. They either love it, or they can't stand it. It's a cult book.

"It's not like *Star Trek* fandom in its breadth, but it certainly is in that people spend a tremendous amount of time thinking and writing me about it. For the amount of sales that I have, I get a tremendous amount of mail. After a new book comes out, I get mail every day for weeks! I also get mail from whole families, because I have that feature in the back, the 'Do-it-Yourself-Beanworld' contest with the fill-in-the-blanks. I'll get huge batches from Mom, Dad and all the children filling in these things. So, *somebody* is spending an awful lot of time thinking about this and enjoying it together as a group experience. I get mail from people saying they think about it all the time, which is weird, because I do, too.

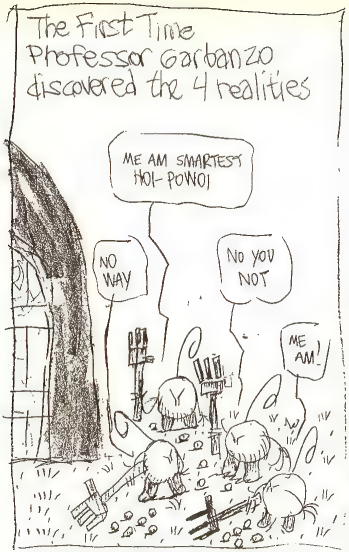
"There's a very active participation in the fandom," he adds, "because there are obviously many mysteries in *Beanworld*. I drop clues all the time, and only in the last couple of issues have I started tying some of the things up. The stuff I'm working on right now ties up an *awful* lot of things."

Marder reveals that he's nearing the end of the beginning of his epic. "I'm saying, 'This is the beginning of the heart of *Beanworld*, and we've now closed the door on this.' If it were a Dave Sim book, we would say, 'This is the first novel,' and we could close the door on it and go on to the next phase. I'm very antsy to get to the next phase, because *Beanworld* is very well-plotted, in terms of its beginning, middle and end, and I want to be done with the beginning. I want to get into the stuff that has really excited me for a while, and I've barely gotten past the tip of the iceberg.

"With issue #19, there's a new character who's key to getting to the next phase. I really want to get there, but I can't get there until I tie up some of this origin stuff!"

Marder says the story took on a life of its own when he was plotting the upcoming issue, in which he knew he was going to have to temporarily suspend the book's quarterly schedule.

"Last winter, I reached a point where I realized I had fallen off sched-



Representing the next phase are the Pod'l'Pool cuties who are being taught the ways of the Beanworld by Professor Garbanzo.

UPSIDEDOWN & BACKWARDS
POING!
TEE HEE, MR. SPOCK, WHAT'S THE HOLD UP? LET'S GET GOIN' TO A HOI-POLLOI RING HERD!
C'MON SOLDIER, WAKE UP— WE HAVE WORK TO DO!

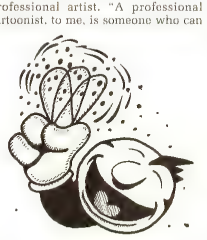
"Beanworld isn't a place; it's a process," explains writer/artist Marder.

All Beanworld Art: Larry Marder

ule. I had 16 pages written for *Beanworld* #20, my next comic. I was going to have an eight-page flashback in it, where Professor Garbanzo was going to think about the new character's origin. Clearly, I was out of my mind to think I could do it in eight pages!" Marder exclaims. "Right now, I think I've got it wrapped up at 48, but it's so big that it's becoming its own book. Whether I'll make a 60-page [book] with a 48-page flashback or a stand-alone thing, I'll decide with Eclipse when it's done. The way things are now, I think it's going to stand alone and be, in essence, *Beanworld* #0.

"I also have *Beanworld* #20 wrapped up. When it fell off the schedule, there was a certain amount of freedom, a liberating feeling of not having a deadline breathing down my neck, and it's the first time I've had that since *Beanworld* #1. It was going back to the pure joy of storytelling. I can do that, because I own my own stuff and nobody can really get mad at me. Commercially, it's kind of insane, but it's how things worked out—I don't have an overwhelming demand to get the book out because I need the money. I had to get back to the point where I'm telling the stories because I *wanted* to tell the stories."

Marder doesn't consider himself a professional artist. "A professional cartoonist, to me, is someone who can

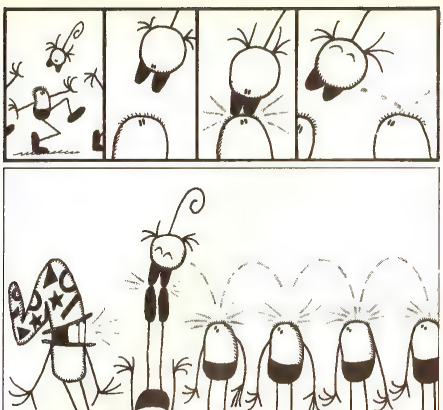


draw Spider-Man this month, draw Batman next month and Richie Rich the month after that. That's their job—they draw for a living," he explains. "They draw comics for a living. I'm a professional advertising person—that's what I've been all my life, and that's what I still am.

"*Beanworld* is my art, and it's all I'm interested in doing. It just so happens that *Beanworld*, as my art, manifests itself as a comic book, but it didn't start out as a comic book—and it may not end up as a comic book. Without sounding too pretentious, it's this myth that I'm working on. It's completely separate and stands alone, and that's what I'm interested in."

The first phase may begin wrapping up around *Beanworld* #20, but Marder is plotting out the future, which will center on the conflict between the current cast and the next generation of beans.

"Clearly, by issue #22 or #23, we're going to be off into the baby beans, the Pod'l'Pool cuties," he reveals. "They really represent the next phase. They're growing up, and as they become adults, conflicts will arise with the original Beanworlders, who were casualties in the mess-up with Gran'Ma'Pa—their birth was a big mess, and everybody was all messed up. This second generation is growing up with the Float Factor as a part of



"I wanted to do something where I was storytelling through body language and eyes, and that's what the beans are," notes Marder.

their life, with the discoveries that Professor Garbanzo is making—they're growing up in a world where Beanish disappears every day, and nobody knows where he's going.

"They have completely different ideas about the world they're growing up in than the original beans do. So, the upcoming storylines will be in the conflicts between these generations."

Marder says everything that has been planned will eventually come to fruition in future storylines. "All the seeds are basically planted for that, and you'll be able to go back and say, 'I can see where that started,' but the basic thrust has always been this poetic idea of the bean plant. Bean plants grow up and out, and that's what's going to happen in the storyline.

"I have the beginning, several middles and the end [of the series]—and the several middles are really signposts I know I'm going to hit at certain points. But I'm going to really meander between the signposts, because that's where the fun is—waking up and saying, 'Gee, what am I going to do next issue?' I certainly know what the end is, there's no question about that, but whether it's issue #75, #100 or #5,000, I don't know. We only have so much time in our lives, and we can only move so fast, but I'm doing the best that I can. I have tons of notes and fragments, so that if I walk out and get hit by a bus, there are people who can figure out what I was doing. Hopefully, though, I can finish it myself."

When *Tales of the Beanworld* began years ago, it's no surprise that even its beginning wasn't the traditional comics origin story. "It wasn't a bat flying through a window, that's for sure!" Marder laughs. "When I was in art school, I was swept up in the conceptual art movement, which maintains that form counts as next to nothing, and it's a waste of time to worry about foreshortening and perspective. Everything is idea art.

"Put together with my love of comics, I was trying to make things progressively more simple. I was reading an issue of *Spider-Man* when it occurred to me that Stan Lee was able to get this complete range of emotions with all eyes, hands and dialogue – there were no facial expressions whatsoever, particularly in those days. They goof with that a little more now.

"I wanted to do something where I was storytelling through body language and eyes, and that's what the beans are. They're completely stripped down to the bare minimum. I'm still hopelessly stuck in conceptualism. That, Marvel Comics and underground comics all influenced me at the same time. So, in 1972, I gave up everything to investigate this new territory.

"The name 'Beanworld' didn't happen for three or four more years," he says. "I was growing a vegetable garden in 1975. I got the idea by watching these bean plants grow; I wanted to create a world like that. After many, many years of false starts, it all fell together in 1980."

Marder explains that his childhood interest in Native American culture, which he had put aside for many years, spurred him on.

"When that was reawakened," he says, "I started looking at primitive tribal cultures, and *Beanworld* solidified with the character of Grand Ma'Pa. It was easy after that—I just woke up and knew what to do."

The writer/artist says he was heavily into comics while growing up. "I was very lucky—I was born in 1951, which means that I started to read when the Mort Weisinger red kryptonite-robot-Superboy universe was in full flower. I was 10 years old when the Marvel Universe began, and 18 when the undergrounds started. Marvel coincides with my adolescence, so as it sprouted and bloomed, so did my brain. It was a very good time to have been born! When I got to the age where I was getting tired of it, I discovered Robert Crumb!"

When it came time to do *Beanworld*, Marder was lucky to find a publisher rather easily. He was a vice-president at a small Chicago agency when he took the material that comprised *Beanworld* #1 and did over-sized mini-comics, giving them away at conventions.

"The first year I did that, it was 32 pages with a paper clip at the top. I got a letter from Jim Shooter, who thought it was great and told me to stick to it," he says. "That was all I needed to keep me going.

"The following year, Eclipse made me an offer. They were expanding into color comics at the time; they said they weren't really interested in doing black-and-white comics, but if I wanted to publish it myself, they would distribute it for me. We shook hands at a salad bar in Oakland in 1984, and that's our deal to this day!"

One of the strangest stories in comics occurred in the five-part *Total Eclipse*, published several years ago and featuring all of the company's characters in a huge crossover tale (CS #3). The mini-series saw Miracleman and Aztec Ace co-starring with *Beanworld* heroes.

"I was very happy with the way it turned out. If you can't have fun, what's the point?" says Marder (who points out that prior to *Total Eclipse*, the *Beanworld* characters actually

(continued on page 66)

The JOKER'S KEEPER

By BOB MILLER

When Batman gets animated, Paul Dini tickles the funnybone of the Clown Prince of Crime.

When it comes to killing people with laughter, no one does it better than the Joker. But, who writes his material? On Batman: The Animated Series, *it's Paul Dini.*

For more than a decade, Dini has written scripts for TV animation, serving as story editor on The Ewoks/Droids Adventure Hour *(which he discussed in STARLOG YEARBOOK #3), John Kricfalusi's version of* Beany & Cecil *(CS #5) and* Tiny Toon Adventures *(CS #15), for which he won two Emmy Awards.*

On Batman, *Dini story-edits along with Alan Burnett (CS #29), Michael Reaves and Martin Pasko. He has written 10 scripts—most starring the Joker—plus a few episodes in collaboration with other writers. His solo stories include "Heart of Ice" (the acclaimed Mr. Freeze story), "Joker's Favor," "Joker's Wild," "Zatanna," "Mad as a Hatter," "The Laughing Fish," "The Man Who Killed Batman," "Harley & Ivy," "Almost Got 'Im" (featuring all the major villains) and "The Worry Men."*

In live-action, Dini wrote two Monsters *episodes, plus* Double Dragon, *an action-adventure feature to be lensed by Imperial Entertainment.*

One Dini story will be drawn by series co-producer Bruce Timm for a DC Batman Adventures *graphic novel, which deals with how Harley Quinn came to be the Joker's "hench-wench." He's also co-writing the new 70-minute animated* Batman *video.*

COMICS SCENE: What accounts for the animated *Batman*'s success?

PAUL DINI: It's the coolest-looking world on television. Even if nobody listens to the dialogue, you turn it on because it's a great-looking show. You can't look at the version of Gotham City that Eric Radomski and Bruce Timm created and just not love it.

CS: How did the show's writers translate *Batman* from comics?

DINI: From a writer's point-of-view, we wanted to transpose classic elements of the Batman stories into animation. In some cases, we adapted [six] stories that existed before, and in and of themselves were classic Batman stories—such as the Ra's al Ghul stories, which were adapted by Denny O'Neil (who created that character) and Len Wein.

Bruce Timm and I adapted two stories, "The Laughing Fish" and "The Joker's Five-Way Revenge," into one. Those stories were by O'Neil and Steve Englehart, and we chose some of the more dramatic elements and combined them into one story. Len Wein adapted a story of his own called "Moon of the Wolf," where Batman fights a chemically-created werewolf.

We went mostly for a certain type of tone that we liked in the early Batman stories, where Batman was a grim, avenging creature of the night. In his early appearances, we don't know that much about Batman. He doesn't speak

much. He'll help people in trouble, but he's more like this force of nature that comes in and makes a situation right, then vanishes.

We did not use the Batman who speaks out every action he's planning, or gives long-winded dialogue when he's in a fight. We thought that weakened the character. When Batman's in a fight, he throws a punch and that's it.

CS: Isn't that unusual for a TV cartoon?

DINI: One of the challenges that we faced as writers was to tell the story and move the plot visually, not necessarily with much dialogue. Batman's world is *very* visual. In our show, it's a stunning and unique visual. If you spend a lot of time with Batman talking and explaining things, that dilutes both him and the power of that world.

CS: In what ways does the animated *Batman* differ from the comics?

DINI: *Batman* comics make a wonderful springboard to start from for developing the animated series. We wanted to present a classic vision of Batman, a sort of archetypal Batman.

In the animated series, Batman is an amalgam of all his different personas. He's more akin to the Batman of the early '40s and then, more toward the Dark Knight version.

He lives in the shadow of his parents' deaths. Something that we may never really touch on in the TV show is Bruce Wayne's transformation into Batman as a catharsis to deal with his parents' deaths.

CS: What approach was taken in adapting the comic-book villains?

DINI: In some cases, we reinvented the characters from what they were in the comics, such as Mad Hatter, Two-Face, Poison Ivy. They're still recognizable from their comic book incarnations, but we shaped the origins in a special way to serve the needs of our series a little bit better. In the case of Two-Face, Mad Hatter and Mr. Freeze, we infused a good bit of pathos into the characters to make them more human, more believable.

" 'Two-Face' is two of our most heartfelt episodes," Dini notes, "where [Batman] loses a friend and gains a deadly enemy."

The villains were played pretty much for laughs in the 1960s TV show. They had their affectations and there were some great actors performing them. But in our series, we looked *beyond* the bizarre costumes to find out, "What's unique about the Mad Hatter that's compelling? What's the story behind the Riddler? Why is Poison Ivy a murderess? What prompts them to do these things?" We uncovered great things about the characters. They're as much a part of Batman's world as Robin, Alfred and Commissioner Gordon.

CS: Most of your scripts feature the Joker. What's so appealing about him?

DINI: I happen to like him a lot. He has this perverse, sadistic side, but it's counter-balanced by the veneer of being a funny clown. He's somebody

"The Joker believes that Batman exists to give him new challenges," observes Dini, "so he looks forward to their duels."

All Batman Animated Characters & Art Trademark & Copyright 1992 DC Comics Inc. /Courtesy Warner Bros. TV.

who could be your best friend, you know, like [*unctuously*], "Oh, I'm *so* glad to see you. Ooooh, look, I've got a balloon animal for you. How are ya?" Pulling funny jokes and being your best pal, and then as soon as you're not looking, he shoves you in a pit of hyenas who rip you to shreds.

One new villain we've created is Harley Quinn, the Joker's henchgirl. She's the willing helper in all of his antics and takes good care of him while he plots his crimes against Batman. She adores him and would love to one day settle down with him, but he barely even notices her.

I created her because—specifically, in one episode, the Joker had a plot where he needed a girl accomplice. He just had to have a pretty girl bring a cake into the room like a showgirl, and then leave [in "Joker's Favor"]. And we thought, well, in the TV shows, the villain usually had a moll with him. Why don't we make this character into something more?

At recording sessions, the actors really get into it. Mark Hamill does the Joker, and Arleen Sorkin, Harley Quinn. Mark, when he plays the Joker, is unique in that he doesn't sit down to record his lines. He stands up and acts out the character with his whole body. He's throwing his arms out and snarling and smiling and grinning and acting really frantic, and he *is* the Joker. And Arleen will be in her booth sitting next to him and look up and go, "Wow." But their back-and-forth banter is very nice. It's kind of a warped Punch-and-Judy show.

When we were feeling our way with the earlier scripts, the Joker had a group of henchmen and he would be very hyperactive, very funny, but in some stories he was sort of infantile, which we didn't like. We discovered when we put Harley in the story, it gave the Joker a bit of stature. Harley could be silly and goofy and overanxious to please, and the Joker could be a little bit more restrained, a little bit meaner, more psychotic—more demonic, actually.

As we worked with the Joker, his sadistic side came out. Batman knows that his own image can spark fear in criminals. In our series, the Joker realizes that *his* image sparks fear in innocent people. The threat of what the Joker can do to you is worse than him actually pulling out a gun and shooting you. People live in terror of

the Joker, and he *knows* this. And he willingly exploits that.

CS: The relationship between Batman and the Joker is always interesting.

DINI: He views Batman as his equal. Batman is *his* property. The Joker really believes that Batman exists to give him new challenges. He looks forward to their duels.

In fact, in "The Man Who Killed Batman," Batman's involved in a fight and falls to his death. And the person who killed him is this little drippy guy who works as a mob underling. When the Joker hears of it, he's furious. It's the ultimate irony. Somebody killed Batman and it *wasn't* him. Even worse than it being Penguin or Two-Face, it's this little *nothing* guy. And for awhile, the Joker is really grief-stricken. He *misses* Batman. He *mourns* him. And then, to make himself feel better, he tries to kill the guy who killed Batman. That's the capper on the joke.

Batman made the Joker what he is today. And the Joker has always been looking to thank Batman for that in his own sick, sinister way.

CS: What about the Mr. Freeze show?

DINI: The way I wrote "Heart of Ice" is, I worked backwards from the visual. What if you had a man sitting in this refrigerated room and as he wept, his tears turned into *snow*? What would cause him to cry?

It's basically a story of a good man who suffers an accident and it snaps him. It transforms him into this pathetic creature who can't live outside a sub-zero environment. It also turns him vengeful, because he lost somebody very close to him in the same accident. His story is really a vendetta. He has come back almost from the grave, as it were, to settle the score with a guy who ruined his life [corporate exec Ferris Boyle, voiced by Mark Hamill]. That puts Batman in an interesting position where he's not unsympathetic to Mr. Freeze, but he can't let him commit murder, either.

***Batman: The Animated Series* is "the coolest-looking world on television," says writer Paul Dini.**

So, Batman goes in to fight him, and you can tell although he has to stop this guy from murdering a roomful of people, he's not unsympathetic to the man's pain.

I regret we did only *one* show with Mr. Freeze. I'm sorry we never brought him back, now that we've done the first 65. Alan Burnett, one of our producers, kept saying, "How about another Mr. Freeze story?" I would sit down to write one and somehow, I would end up, "Well, the Joker's funnier. Let me write another Joker story." To a degree, I didn't want to write another Mr. Freeze story. I thought his story was so sad and it comes to such an emotional ending that I didn't want to bring him back if he was just going to be a stock villain. I probably will write another Mr. Freeze story, but it has to be tied in with emotions, because that's the great paradox about him. He's someone who *claims* all emotions have been frozen in him, but on the other hand, he's the most passionate one because his pain is so deep.

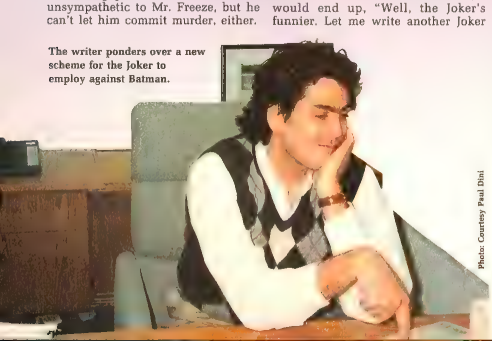
CS: So, the villains are written to be more sympathetic?

DINI: With some of the villains, Batman has a more human side. Mr. Freeze is one of them. Two-Face is *definitely* one of them. We have a fairly new character from the comics named Maxie Zeus, a rich Greek shipping magnate who believes he's the reincarnation of the god Zeus. That story is almost like a Greek tragedy, where Batman works with Maxie's girl friend to try and save him from slipping deeper into madness, and it all kind of sucks them down in the end. It's a tragic story of a guy whose fantasies take him too far.

CS: There seems to be a continuity between the episodes.

DINI: We *do* have a continuity. It's a

(continued on page 60)



The writer ponders over a new scheme for the Joker to employ against Batman.

Photo: Courtesy Paul Dini

ANTHROPOMORPHIC AMBITION

Martin Wagner melds the realistic and the fanciful in "Hepcats."

By HARLEY JEBENS

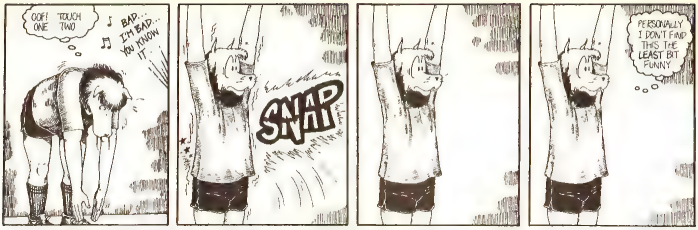
All Hepcats Characters & Art Trademark & Copyright 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992 Martin Wagner

I'm very fortunate," Martin Wagner says over a beer at a coffeehouse in Austin, Texas, the city he calls home. "My family has always been supportive of every creative effort I've tried to do, even when they haven't understood it, which is *most* of the time. My mother is put off by the fact that I'm writing about strippers, and I have sex scenes and bad language, but that's life. People talk that way these days. She keeps asking me when I'm going to get off this stripper story, so she can show the book to the members of her Baptist choir.

"I'm like, 'Well, Mom, maybe I'm not gearing this book towards Baptist choristers—no offense to Baptist choristers. There might be another book for them, but it's *not* this book."

The book Wagner's parents just don't understand is *Hepcats*, a black-and-white comic that the writer/artist has been publishing under his own Double Diamond imprint since 1989. The "stripper story" his mother is reluctant to show to her Baptist buddies is "Snowblind," an 18-part graphic novel that—naivete being the soul of ambition—Wagner launched in the third issue of his series.

"Snowblind" focuses on Erica, one of Wagner's four main characters,, a...Well, just what the heck is Erica, anyway? The "species" of Wagner's other main characters are easy to determine—Joey McLyon is a cat; his roommate Gunther's a rhino; their pal Arnie is a dog; and Arnie's fiancée Erica is—well, Erica is a "funny animal."



Martin Wagner introduced *Hepcats* in college once he "didn't want to do the topical thing anymore. I wanted to do funny stuff about the characters."

Wagner's ambitious "Snow-blind" storyline has just reached its eighth chapter in *Hepcats* #10. This multi-faceted saga begins with Erica in the hospital and flashes back to the incidents that propelled her to that point. The story chronicles the mundane (Joey and Gunther doing their laundry and losing a quarter under the dryer—the stuff of real life to which Wagner adds character-driven comedy) and the tragic, such as Erica's visitation by the mysterious Kevin, an appearance that brings her past crashing down, a past clouded by a sexually-abusive father and bloodied by violence.

Not only is Erica a problem-laden anthropomorphic (Wagner prefers *that* term to the less-heady "funny animal"), she also happens to be a topless dancer, which goes a long way towards explaining Mrs. Wagner's reluctance to introduce her fellow church members to her son's strip.

Wagner notes, "*Hepcats* is an ensemble piece, though I basically focus sharply on one character at a time. The reason I started this long storyline about Erica is because, of the four characters who became the strip's leads, she was the least developed. She was basically nothing more or less than Arnie's girl friend, who happened to dance topless for a living. I really didn't know anything about her.

"I started this graphic novel to explore her character, and it was a bit of a challenge for me, because she was a woman. I wanted to see if I could write that sort of thing. At the time, I was married. My eyes were being opened to various aspects of life I was unaware of—not just what women in our society go through, but....My wife was a topless dancer for a few years. I was getting good first-hand research about that line of work, about what types of personalities are involved, and I wanted to apply this to my comics writing and write real stories about fully-rounded characters."

Wagner originally started *Hepcats* with Joey as "my alter-ego. Right now, it's pretty much an equal mix between Arnie and Joey. Arnie represents all the frustrations I've had, while Joey represents all the frustrations I guess I *wish* I had. Arnie's going through a troubled relationship right now; he has had problems maturing. Basically, many problems that I think a lot of young guys in their late teens or early 20s grow up with; I pump those problems into Arnie.

"Joey is pretty irresponsible," he adds. "Originally, he was looked up to as a role model for Arnie. Arnie's growing up pretty quickly; he has his hands on this girl friend and this whole relationship that Joey has always wished he had, but has never managed to land with any success."

Photo & All Art Courtesy Martin Wagner

"I wanted to do what I wanted without creative restrictions," Wagner states.

"*Hepcats* is an ensemble piece, though I basically focus sharply on one character at a time," Wagner says.

Although Gunther started out as a "genericus roommateus," Wagner admits he has lapsed into being "a straight man for Joey's antics. Gunther has had some sad experiences in his adolescence that colored his personality. That's all to be revealed in the comic, in case anyone's curious as to why Gunther seems so cool and level-headed for a 23-year-old.

"Gunther is meant to represent either everyone's best friend, a good friend you remember or a roommate you wish you had—the guy who's always there with his arm around your shoulder and good advice. I've never had any fan claim to relate to Gunther personally, but I have millions of people telling me that he reminds them of so-and-so or such-and-such."

All Hepcats Art: Martin Wagner

"Gunther [the rhino] is meant to represent everybody's best friend," Wagner explains, "the guy who's always there."

Martin Wagner grew up an "oil brat," which is what Texans call someone whose parents are involved in the petroleum industry. Typically, life in the oil business involves settlement in various exotic ports of call. In Wagner's case, he lived in England, Singapore and Saudi Arabia before coming to rest in Houston at age 11. As a youth, he drew his own comics, creating his own superhero/secret agent team called "The Jackal Squad" and a few funny animal comics.

In his senior year, Wagner was editor of the the school paper. Inspired by Berke Breathed's *Bloom County*, he started *Chester*, a satirical strip lampooning events at his school. (Breathed is a University of Texas alumnus, and worked for the university's *Daily Texan*, the same paper where Wagner would start *Hepcats*.) Chester was the name of the high school mascot, a wildcat. Naturally, Wagner's Chester was a cat as well, albeit a humanized version, not unlike Joey McLyon.

Two years later, Wagner began *Shasta Says*, another satire strip *a la Bloom County*, for the University of Houston's *Daily Cougar*. Since Houston's mascot was a cougar, a humanized cat also figured prominently in this strip.

In 1987, Wagner transferred to UT, where he eventually earned a radio-television-film degree. He decided to try his hand at drawing a strip for his new school's paper, the *Daily Texan*. "I figured for the new strip, I didn't want to do the topical thing anymore. That was getting old. I wanted to do stuff with characters, stories and funny stuff about the characters. I chewed over some ideas and came up with *Hepcats*, and it started in the *Texan* in the summer semester of '87.

"After I had done a year of the strip in the *Texan*, I decided I wanted to do a *Bloom County*-type book collection of my strip. So, I got my savings to-

An extended storyline revolving around Erica explores the character. "I really didn't know anything about her," the creator notes.

Exploring Erica became the 18-chapter graphic novel "Snowblind" for Wagner to "come to terms with the reality of incest and child abuse."

gether and did one. Not being the type to think small, I decided that it wasn't enough for me to get one Xeroxed off and have it stapled. I meant to go to a print shop and get a real, square-bound paperback done, and that's what I did. I made 1,000 copies of *Yo*, the first *Hepcats* book.

"I thought it was well-received. The first signing I ever did, probably still the best I've ever done, was at Dragon's Lair Comics [a comic book store in Austin], where I sold about 100 copies.

"After the book came out, I had two semesters left to go on *Hepcats* before I would eventually be out of school. At that point, the strip was outgrowing its boundaries. I was getting into these characters. I was more interested in doing character development and longer plotlines. I was doing plotlines that would run two, three weeks or more, and having to break them up because longer stories would bore people. That was getting old."

Add to that the fact that Wagner was also "rediscovering" comic books after having given them up in the late '70s, and it would seem almost inevitable that he would take the strip to its next logical step—a comic book—and that he would publish it himself.

"I was very concerned about retaining creative control and not having editors tell me to change Joey into a wombat or something or not let me tell the stories I wanted to tell. I wanted to be able to do what I wanted without any creative restrictions."

Wagner admits that he never really thought about taking his work to any of the established comic-book publishers. "I figured, if it bombed after three issues, I would at least have published work out there that I could then show to the publishers," the writer/artist says. Of course, by the time Wagner's third issue rolled around, he had committed to his 18-chapter magnum opus, and there was no turning back.

Not that the two years since "Snowblind"'s beginning have been easy ones for Wagner. There was his marriage, which began in 1989 and ended with divorce in 1991, and all the attendant financial difficulties which befall a small start-up company like Double Diamond Press.

"I went through a bitter, angry period," he explains. "Around the time of issues #5 and #6, it looked like the book was about to collapse. I had to ask my fans for help [in a "Save *Hepcats*" campaign that saw Wagner offering to draw a sketch for those readers making donations]. I wrote a scathing editorial about speculation and greed and dealers who weren't willing to help."

Now, Wagner says that, "getting distribution isn't tough, but getting treated right can still be a problem. But it can all change with the fans. The bottom line is that alternative publishers such as myself and books like *Hepcats* are published for people who just want to have something to read and enjoy. We don't pretend they're collectable."

Hepcats survived its down period and the black-and-white glut that killed off numerous other titles. Double Diamond has begun publishing its second book, *Eyebeam*, which reprints Sam Hurt's surrealistic comic strip from the *Daily Texan*.

"Happily, *Hepcats* is catching its second wind instead of dying," he reveals. "Retailers are stocking the book, and they're interested in promoting it."

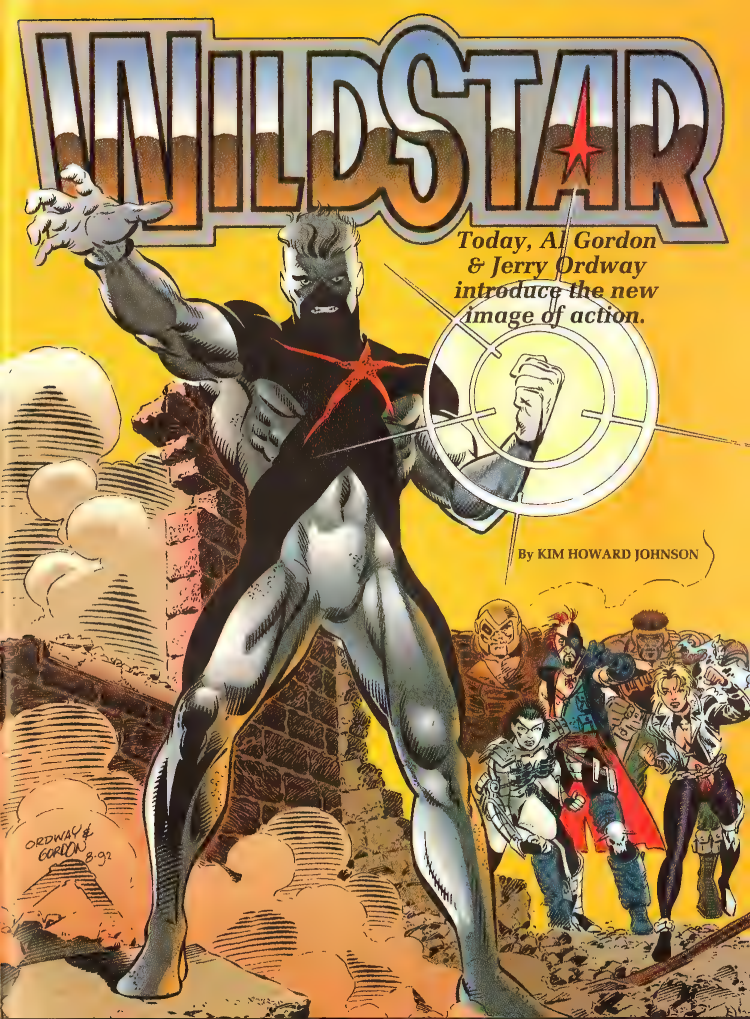
That's a good thing, because Wagner's plans don't end with the finale to "Snowblind" in issue #20. By the graphic novel's end, the *Hepcats* characters will have graduated from college. Issues #21 through #25 will be single-issue stories collectively entitled "The Freshman Quintet," which highlight the collegiate antics of Gunther and Joey in what Wagner calls "a nostalgic look back."

Wagner is beginning an outline for issues #26 through #39, which will be a graphic novel tentatively entitled "Glass Heartbeats," a series of interconnected stories focusing on his characters' romantic relationships. Wagner promises, however, that things won't get "too soapy, though all of these stories will be thematically related." One of those stories "might" be a direct sequel to "Snowblind." Another, "The Passing Game" will focus on Gunther and a high school girl friend. "Rooms with Brittle Views" will highlight Adrian, introduced in issue #2 as an artist friend of Erica's from New Orleans.

It does look like *Hepcats* will be around for a good long time. Wagner has announced he'll keep doing the series through at least issue #100. All of which should come as good news to fans of the exploits of Arnie, Joey, Gunther and to all of those interested in Erica's fate.

"Doing 'Snowblind' is maybe helping me come to terms with the reality that incest and child abuse don't get talked about much in comic books. Even then, they're done in a movie-of-the-week fashion or it's the *Batman* child abuse issue. I mean, I'm not trying to freak everybody out or make them go screaming into the hills, 'Oh, I don't want to read that *Hepcats* nonsense. That's too intense for me,' but I would like to educate people, educate myself, and at the same time, make people aware that this kind of thing happens.

"It's not what the whole series is going to be," says Martin Wagner. "This is just one graphic novel. I have other stories to tell."


WILDSTAR
Today, Al Gordon & Jerry Ordway introduce the new image of action.
By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON
ORDWAY & GORDON 8-92

He has come back to stop a war that starts tomorrow—but if we're lucky, tomorrow will be a little late this week!

"He" is WildStar, the newest superhero from the Image Universe, and star of the four-issue *WildStar: Sky Zero* mini-series (which debuts in January).

Created by Al Gordon (who also inks the comic) and pencilled by Jerry (*Superman*) Ordway, WildStar is a soldier from 30 years in the future who comes to our time to stop the war that's about to erupt in the present day.

"This is a very weird, science-fiction war," says Gordon. "During the Vietnam War, the North Vietnamese were being supplied with technology by the USSR, and the South Vietnamese were being supplied by the United States, and every time one side got a bigger and better gun, the other side would up the ante. The same thing's happening with Earth, except there are two alien races supplying the weapons and vying for certain control over the Earth. They're looking for something, and we don't find out what until the very last issue."

WildStar: Sky Zero ("Sky Zero" being similar to Ground Zero, the center of a nuclear blast) contains plenty of time paradoxes, although they shouldn't prove too difficult. "I'm trying to make the paradoxes fun, rather than confusing," Gordon says.

YOU'RE GETTING SLOW, WILDSTAR. YOU LOOK LIKE SOME ONE I JUST HAD MY WAY WITH!
CARSEN! PERSONE I'M NOT CONVINCED HE'S REALLY DOWN FOR THE COUNT
LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE GOING TO HELL, TOO, BUT I'LL SEND HIM OFF WITH A WHILE AS YOU GET THE CHANCE!
I REALLY DIDN'T THINK YOU'D BE CAREFREE ENOUGH TO LEAVE YOUR BACK TO ME

From 30 years in the future he comes, trying to stop a war from ever starting...

All WildStar, Sky Zero characters & Art Trademark & © copyright 1992 Al Gordon & Jerry Ordway

Penciller Jerry Ordway's attraction to *WildStar* explores his interest in character motivation. "I can't draw something I don't believe in."

"The time machine that WildStar uses was commandeered by one alien race from another, and he uses it to come back in time. But in doing so, instead of just him going back, he actually takes this whole segment of the city with him," Gordon explains. "Basically, his location 30 years in the future changes place with a hunk of Earth from the present. Neither side is applying normal technology."

WildStar's powers—and costume—both come from a very unusual source. "They are symbiotes—basically parasites—that live on him, and give the wearer certain powers, but at a price. 'WildStar' is actually the name of the symbiote, a starfish-like organism that lives on this guy's chest," says Gordon, who notes that the creature also supplies the hero's clothing.

"It grows a membrane on him, which explains why he has a costume. I have a lot of trouble writing superheroes who wear costumes and run around. I got some comments from editors, especially on my *Timber Wolf* job for DC, because I make fun of the genre within the genre. They'll say, 'Oh, you can't do that!' and I say, 'Why not?' These guys are running around with their underwear on the outside of their clothes," he laughs, "and *somebody* should tell them!

"So, I'm always trying to come up with reasons as to *why* they're wearing

...WildStar, a new Image hero, breaks the time barrier to save our world.

these things. WildStar, basically, is naked except for this symbiote that lives on his chest over his heart, and has grown a membrane over him that looks like a costume. Jerry and I designed it, and we came up with something that was really pretty neat and pretty scary. If you were to try and take this symbiote off of somebody—if you could manage it—it would be a lot like the H.R. Giger Alien facehugger that's quite attached. If it were the Hulk yanking it off a lesser superhero, it would take off part of the hero's face with it."

The *WildStar* mini-series begins in the future, as the hero suddenly gets fed up with fighting a 30-year-old war.

"He has been fighting it himself since he was 20, so he's pretty hardened, a Clint Eastwood-type. He's a very pissed-off Panzer tank, a killing machine, and he doesn't like it," Gordon explains. "He decides to go back and change it from ever happening.

"We find out that the story has been happening over and over again, and he has been a part of a loop—he keeps going back in time, but he can't change it. This is the one time that he goes back and thinks he *can* break the time loop. There are lots of weird little time paradoxes, but I'm trying to make it fun, and not get stuck."

The story may involve a number of elements, but Gordon promises that they won't skimp on superheroics. "It's definitely major superhero action. It's full-tilt boogie, it's real rock-and-roll stuff. In the early '60s, when [editor] Julie Schwartz took over and brought back the Flash and all of those heroes, he brought them back in a science-fiction manner, like the chemicals spilling on Barry Allen to make him into the Flash, and the extraterrestrial who gave Hal Jordan his Green Lantern ring. This is the same idea, except it's more in line with *Terminator* and *ALIENS*. It's science fiction from the '90s, but it's still a more in-your-face superhero book."

Gordon and Ordway feel their concepts are strong for *WildStar*, but their storytelling is even stronger.

"I worked with Neal Adams for a short time at Continuity," notes Gordon, "and one of the things he said that I'll never forget is, 'There's no such thing as a bad concept—it's all in how you do it.' Anybody can sit down and tell a story around a campfire. It's *how* you tell the story. You could come up with the most banal, ridiculous basis for a story, but if you tell it well, nobody will notice that it was badly set up—they'll just notice this exquisitely-told story. So, I'm hoping that between Jerry and I, we have a neat story with really neat characterization."

Like so many Image titles, *WildStar* is a project which its creator has been carrying around with him for a long time. Gordon says he has had the idea for the past few years, and it's actually loosely based on things he did as a child. "It has changed so much that it's almost unfair to say that it's the same concept, but it has been close to its current incarnation for the past four or five years. I was actually planning on submitting it to DC at some point, but I never got around to it."

Gordon first achieved prominence in comics as an inker, but says he has been a writer since childhood. He was inspired by Keith Giffen to direct his writing efforts toward comics, and scripted the acclaimed "Quiet Darkness" storyline for *Legion of Super-Heroes*. Gordon has since expanded his writing efforts, including DC's recent *Timber Wolf* mini-series, but found it increasingly frustrating to create characters over which he had no control. He couldn't pass up the chance to create a title for Image.

"I got a lot of leeway from my editors on *Timber Wolf*, and they basically just tried to focus me, which is the mark of a good editor," he says. "But no matter what you're doing in comics, you're part of the machinery and at the whim of the editor to decide how much more you can be involved. You're just a cog in the machine. Here, I have to put up or shut up. If people don't like it, I have no one else to blame."

His longtime friendships with Erik Larsen and Todd McFarlane eventually led to his involvement with Image, and the inclusion of Ordway.

"They kept saying, 'You've got to do something with us,' but I felt a little weird, because you're out there on your own. I finally said OK, but had to figure out how I was going to do it. I was talking to Jerry one afternoon about Image, but told him that since I was a writer/inker, I had to find a penciller. He said, 'I'm interested,' and I said, 'Great!' I would have to be completely nuts not to want to be working with someone as talented as Jerry—he's one of the five or six best artists in comics. I told him the three different ideas I had, and he called me back the next morning and said he wanted to do *WildStar* with me," says Gordon, noting that it's a total collaboration. "It has changed a lot since we started. It's really a group project now."

Ordway agrees that *WildStar* was something he wanted to do when Gordon first described it to him. "I wanted to make an attempt to reach a younger audience," says Ordway. "I think DC would admit, in some respects, that they've turned their attention away from the younger kids

All WildStar Art: Jerry Ordway/Al Gordon/Colors: Keshna Rade/Dynamics

"He's a pissed-off Panzer tank, a killing machine, and he doesn't like it," says creator/writer Al Gordon of WildStar.

that Marvel has always had a hold on. I don't envision myself as a million-seller or anything, but I would like the opportunity to do something that's a little outside the cut of Superman or Captain Marvel. This character is more of a world-weary soldier, and the twist is a bit of time travel."

Ordway's role on the title—penciller and kibitzer—is ideal for him, after years of scripting *Adventures of Superman* (CS #3).

"I didn't want to become involved on a writing level, because I've been doing that for years," says Ordway. "I was looking forward to a project that I could concentrate on drawing in an exciting fashion. *Superman* fit that mold, but *Superman* has baggage that a 14-year-old or even a 20-year-old doesn't really care about. Much of the popular stuff in comics speaks more to them maybe for no other reason than that it hasn't been around for a long time. Superman has been around more than 50 years, and Marvel has a bit of that problem too—Spider-Man is probably the only one that breaks that mold, because he has been revitalized.

"But Marvel has been around for 30 years now, too. When I was a kid, I liked Marvel because it was part of my generation, and I think that may be part of Image's appeal to younger kids—a feeling that it's *their* company, in the same way that Valiant is probably the college-age ground-level comics project for the die-hard comics fan who's tired of Marvel and DC crossovers. Image works on a different level—it's a little more direct and visceral, and the focus in those books is on style; most of the Image creators would probably agree that they're more interested in drawing an exciting comic. That's what I want to do—something that I can look at and see it jump off the page."

When the pair decided to collaborate, Gordon had his story planned out, but as they began to work together, they started to develop new ideas.

"If I'm going to be drawing something, I want it to work for me the way my mind works," explains Ordway. "I've always been into character motivation, and I can't draw something I don't believe in. It sounds stupid, but that goes for costumes as well. In designing a character, if a guy has a nifty look with spikes all over the place, as an artist, I'm going to think, 'If this guy raises his arm, is he going to stab himself in the ear?'

"And it's the same way with the story. I think I understand how stories work, and Al has shown a real flair for writing."

Ordway is leaving *Adventures of Superman* with issue #500, and says the offer to do an Image series came at just the right time.

"I was seeing a lot of excitement generated by Image, and having done a number of smaller comic shows this

(continued on page 58)

All WildStar Art: Courtesy Malibu/Image

Trying to yank off WildStar's "costume" would be like trying to rip off a Giger Alien facehugger, Gordon explains as WildStar demonstrates.

HATE STORY

Peter Bagge loves chronicling Buddy Bradley's offbeat exploits, but he won't do it forever.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Thousands of readers are finding more to love about *Hate* with every issue. Winner of a 1990 Harvey Award for Best Cartoonist, creator Peter Bagge continues to turn out the title for Fantagraphics four times yearly.

"*Hate* pretty much falls under the category of an alternative comic book sold mainly—but not exclusively—to adults," says Bagge.

The star of *Hate* is Buddy Bradley, a character Bagge revived, overhauled and aged for his own title. Admitting that Buddy is "vaguely autobiographical," Bagge says his hero "falls into the categories of slacker, low-life scum or a low-rent bohemian—whatever you want to call him. He's in his 20s, living on his own for the first time, and hangs out with people like himself.

"Since he's vaguely bohemian, he doesn't have any clear-cut ideologies. But, he's into stuff—he's into his records, and, of course, he thinks his opinions on records, movies and art are a little off," Bagge says.

Hate also revolves around Buddy's supporting characters, including sometimes-girl friends Valerie and Lisa, and—as Bagge refers to them—the rest of "Buddy's Pals 'n Gals."

"There are two other guys and two women, and they form this fivesome that's not overly-modeled after, but matches up pretty evenly with the Archie gang, with Buddy being Archie," says Bagge, who describes his style as very cartoony. "No Jack Kirby influences here," he laughs.

His "degenerate *Archie*" actually followed a five-year run writing and drawing 15 issues of *Neat Stuff*, a title which accurately describes the book's contents. "It had a whole bunch of characters and many different storylines. It was almost like an anthology comic, even though I did all of it myself," he recalls.

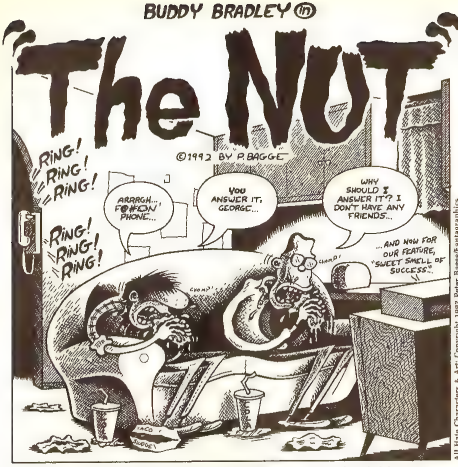
Readers who want to catch up with Bagge's early work can find it collected in paperbacks, including *The Bradleys, Studs Kirby: The Voice of America, Junior and Other Losers* and *Stupid Comics*. "One of the running stories in it was called 'The Bradley Family,' which was reminiscent of *The Simpsons*—there's a similar kind of situation, with the suburban dysfunctional family that fights a lot. Buddy Bradley was the oldest kid in the family, and after a while, I started running out of ideas for The Bradley Family and [coming up with] ideas for Buddy himself. So, I aged him rapidly, soap-opera-style, and put the other characters I used to work with in *Neat Stuff* out to pasture."

Of *Hate* #11, Peter Bagge says, "It's going to be the most degenerate issue yet."

Bagge admits that Buddy's adventures in *Hate* aren't far removed from his own life, in spirit if not in fact. "They're autobiographical in that I relate and empathize in almost everything he does, says and thinks," the artist explains. "But, he's also modeled after friends I grew up with in high

Photo: By a Copyright 1989 Arthur S. Avery

The stories are "autobiographical in that I relate and empathize in almost everything he does, says and thinks," notes the creator.


BUDDY BRADLEY in
The NUT
©1992 BY P.BAGGE
RING! RING! RING!
ARRGH... FORGOT PHONE...
YOU ANSWER IT, GEORGE...
WHY SHOULD I ANSWER IT? I DON'T HAVE ANY FRIENDS...
RING! RING! RING!
...AND NOW FOR OUR FEATURE, "SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS."
All Hate Characters & Art: Copyright 1992 Peter Bagge/Fantagraphics

"You don't want to read a comic about a character who's very thoughtful," says Bagge. And therein lies the appeal of *Hate*.

school and present-day friends. I tend to model the *Hate* characters after people who have a much worse attitude than I—not that I have the best attitude, but I don't have a chip on my shoulder. I know people who do, so they're much more inclined to say and act things out before they think. That simply makes them more interesting comic book characters.

"You don't want to read a comic about a character who's very thoughtful; they might think mean and evil things, but they won't do anything about it. I, at least, like to think I'm a much more thoughtful or involved person than Buddy Bradley is, so therein lies the difference."

The tone of "The Bradley Family" is "pretty similar" to that of Buddy's adventures in *Hate*, according to Bagge. "My stories were probably much more slapstick when I first started with *Neat Stuff*. I would get a bit silly and do things that weren't plausible. When I was self-publishing ages ago, before I moved to Fantagraphics, one of the first 'Bradley Family' stories I ever did had the father get mad at Butch, the youngest son. His father was trying to teach him to play baseball, but he got so frustrated at Butch that he walloped him with the bat, and he went flying all the way across the neighborhood. People don't fly in *Hate*," he says, noting that only the attitude and approach are alike.

Bagge's list of influences is long and varied, and a few would almost seem to be curious choices.

"As a kid, my one favorite person would be Charles M. Schulz, even though it's not too apparent," he reveals. "It's all in the way that people relate, and he can milk a lot out of what seems to be a simple situation, like two kids walking down the street. That's all he needs as a premise to get going. It all depends on what you talk about. He has very much influenced me in that way. I also loved all the artists in *Mad*, especially Don Martin, Al Jaffee and Sergio Aragones. Warner Bros. cartoons were also among my favorite things.

"Later on, I discovered undergrounds, and Robert Crumb was a big influence. When I discovered comics from the past, I became a big fan and admirer of both Harvey Kurtzman and Basil Wolverton: to a lesser degree, I admired Big Daddy Roth's artwork—that was a bit of an influence visually."

As to his own writing and drawing styles, "I guess it's just whatever works," he says. "Even a couple of years ago, I would attempt to draw an actual elbow that bends, but it didn't work. By making everybody very rubbery and fluid, it just adds to the expressiveness. Whatever I try to say in body language, it's more effective for me not to stick to rules.

"Normally, when I start out a story, the setting is pretty normal—you don't start off with people screaming and hollering, so I'll actually pay attention in splash panels to things like horizon lines and perspective, to try and have things make sense. But, by the end, all of that goes by the wayside, as people start screaming and hollering. And it becomes much more fun, too."

The cartoon Buddy came to life on a very special photo cover for *Hate* #10. "We had a Buddy Bradley lookalike contest, and I decided to put the winner's photograph on the cover, so that people would see an actual photo of this cartoon character," Bagge explains. "The contest turned out better than I thought, simply because one guy who entered the contest—he entered the last day of the deadline—looked so much like Buddy Bradley, it was frightening. I can't believe this is

RACKITY! RACKITY! RACKITY! RACKITY! RACKITY!
ALL THIS PAPER COMES FLYING OUT? SEE? ISN'T THAT WILD?
LISA!
...THAT'S THE SECOND TIME YOU DID THAT THIS MORNING! I DIDN'T I TELL YOU TO LEAVE THAT KEY ALONE?
BUT SEE WHIZ, I CAN'T FIGURE OUT THESE COMPLICATED MACHINES IN ONE DAY! I'M JUST A GIRL!
"I JUST A GIRL—JESUS! JUST A MORON IS MORE LIKE IT!"
All Art: Peter Bagge

Says Bagge, "Whatever I try to say in body language, it's more effective for me not to stick to the rules."

HEY, WHERE ARE YOU GOING? YOU CAN'T LEAVE ME HERE LIKE THIS!
OH NO? WHY NOT?
BECAUSE! I'M TOO EMBARRASSED TO BE SEEN THIS WAY ALONE! YOU HAVE TO TAKE ME HOME WITH YOU!
OH I DID, DO I? THINK AGAIN, SHERLOCK..
AW C'MON, BUDDY! BE A PAL!
NO!
OH, I GET IT! YOU'RE TOO GOOD TO BE SEEN WITH THE LIKES OF ME, IS THAT IT? HUH, MISTER LOSER?
MR. LOSER WHOSE GIRL-FRIEND DUMPED HIM!
JUST IGNORE HER. LET PEOPLE THINK SHE'S TALKING TO SOMEONE ELSE.

All Hate Art & Photos: Courtesy Peter Bagge

Of his *Hate* ensemble, Bagge notes, "They form this fivesome that matches up pretty evenly with the Archie gang."

a real human being! Whenever I show this picture to people, they go, 'Oh, my God!' It's unreal."

After Buddy's disastrous adventures as the manager of "Leonard and the Love Gods" in issues #9 and #10, Buddy finds a job for his neurotic ex-girl friend Lisa at the used bookstore where he works. "It sounds like a simple premise, but much wackiness is involved," Bagge promises. "I'm really into this story: I think it's my best one yet."

Hate #11 features Buddy and Lisa in a story that, as one might expect, takes place following the events in issue #10. "It's going to be the most degenerate issue yet," he predicts.

Though Bagge serves as both scribe and artist on *Hate*, he thinks his greatest strength is his writing. "I try to keep a narrative flow going," he says. "I've gotten so used to telling these longer, full-issue stories that when people ask me to do one- or two-pagers for magazines for good money, I can't think up short gags! I'm stuck working the way I am.

"Doing the writing and drawing myself, the whole thing has become so interlocked that it's hard for me and readers to imagine them separated. Occasionally in the past, I've written things other people have drawn and vice versa, and those come out startlingly different. I haven't done that in a while, and I would like to do that again. But, it's the writing I'm most proud of."

Despite his abundance of ideas for Buddy, Bagge probably won't continue *Hate* past issue #15 or #20. "It's all pretty fuzzy now," he says. "I do know that I don't want to do *Hate* forever, and I would like to try to do something a little bit different."

His characters may find life in another format, however. Due to the success of *The Simpsons* and *Ren & Stimpy*, Bagge has been getting numerous offers from Hollywood for an animated series. "The chances are 99.9 percent that it will never go anywhere," Peter Bagge says. "I'm real reluctant to go down to Hollywood to actively pursue this kind of thing—I want to stay in Seattle and keep doing comics. But, I'm open to that. Everyone seems to want to animate 'Girly-Girl' for prime-time television. I think they're nuts, but if that's what they want to do, I'll go along with it. If things do progress, I'll go along."

Buddy Bradley, *Hate*'s star, "falls into the categories of slacker, low-life scum or a low-rent bohemian," the artist says.

LATER
I WONDER IF SHE'S STILL OUT THERE
I GUESS IT'S WORTH RISKING A PEEK.
OH NO! THREE WHOLE HOURS AND SHE HASN'T MOVED A MUSCLE!
WHAT DOES SHE WANT FROM ME?
OH, GREAT! SHE'S NOT THERE ANYMORE!
SHE MUST'VE SNUCK IN SOMEHOW!
TIP, TIP, TAP, TAP, TIP.. SCRITCH, SCRITCH, SCRATCH, SCRATCH. TIP. TIP, TAP, TAP, TIP.
ARRGH! THAT SOUND IS DRIVING ME CRAZY!
GO AWAY! LEAVE ME ALONE!
THAT DOES IT! I'M GONNA PUT AN END TO THIS ONCE AND FOR ALL.
TIP TAP TIP..

"By making everybody very rubbery and fluid, it just adds to the expressiveness," notes Bagge.

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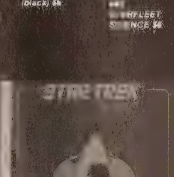

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Arabian Nights

Polishing their magic lamp, John Musker & Ron Clements conjure up "Aladdin."

By KYLE COUNTS

In Hollywood, a director is largely measured by how well his most recent film fared at the box office. Imagine, then, trying to repeat the success of a movie that has grossed upwards of $200 million worldwide. John Musker and Ron Clements, co-directors of *The Little Mermaid* and *The Great Mouse Detective*, don't have to imagine the inherent pressures of such a scenario: As co-directors (and co-writers with *Little Monsters*' Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio) of Walt Disney Pictures' newest animated feature *Aladdin*, they are literally following in their own footsteps.

Had studio chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg been a bit more insistent, however, Musker and Clements might have taken on the tentatively-titled *King of the Jungle* (slated as the studio's 1994 animated release) instead of *Aladdin* as their follow-up to *The Little Mermaid*. "There were three projects we were offered [after *Mermaid*]," recalls Musker, sitting in the pair's office at the studio's Glendale, California animation facility.

"There was *King of the Jungle*, which was the one that Jeffrey wanted us to do the most, *Swan Lake* and *Aladdin*. Of the three, *Swan Lake* seemed like it was too close to *Mermaid*. *King of the Jungle*...well, I think we're a little more oriented toward fantasy. But we really liked *Aladdin*, and it seemed like it could be exciting."

The year was 1988, and Howard Ashman and Alan Menken had already written the song score for *Aladdin*—it was, in fact, written during the final stages of *The Little Mermaid* and before *Beauty & the Beast*. Not only had the duo penned six tunes, Ashman had written a 40-page story treatment for *Aladdin* as part of his three-picture deal (one live-action, two animated) with Disney.

Continues Musker, "I think it was Howard who suggested doing *Aladdin* [to the studio]. We weren't involved at all at that point; we were trying to do *Mermaid*. From what we could piece together, it seemed like the studio liked some of the songs, but they tried to develop a script based on Howard's treatment and didn't like the scripts they were getting. That's when they said, 'Let's just get a story we like and then we'll fold songs back into it.' So, they sort of abandoned his treatment."

By the time Musker and Clements (who discussed past projects in STARLOG #108 and CS #11) came aboard, several scripts had been written for *Aladdin*—including one by *Beauty & the Beast* screenwriter Linda Woolverton (CS #25)—and a "certain amount of visual development" had occurred, according to Clements. "We read Howard's treatment and some of the scripts, but we basically started from scratch, using elements from this and that. We re-developed it into a new treatment and a new script."

Photo: Gene Ingalls

John Musker and Ron Clements, *Aladdin*'s co-directors and co-writers, faced the challenge of following *Beauty & the Beast* and their own *Little Mermaid*.

"We didn't literally start over," interjects Musker, "but we had to back away from [the project] for a while; we were so close to it. Our first draft... well, Jeffrey [Katzenberg] didn't endorse it quite so enthusiastically. We needed to get some fresh eyes, writing-wise, so we auditioned Ted and Terry, live-action writers who had done a script for [Disney's] Hollywood Pictures. They came in and helped re-outline the story, and then they wrote scenes and we sort of rewrote over their stuff. Some of our original script is still in there and some isn't. Some is Robin [Williams], a bunch of it is Ted and Terry. It's the usual Hollywood mishmash," he laughs.

In discussing the differences between the early drafts of *Aladdin* and the final result, Musker notes that "we pushed the Genie more in the earlier versions. We saw him as a *real* animation-type character, as sort of our Beetlejuice—when he's on stage, he takes over. In Linda's treatment, Aladdin had a dog sidekick, but we felt that a monkey hadn't been done very often in animation, so we [changed him to a monkey]. The Princess in Linda's treatment had a hand-maiden/confidante. We got rid of [the companion] and made her a Bengal tiger instead; we felt it gave the story more of an animation hook."

Other changes included combining the two villains found in the original Aladdin stories into one heavy (here named Jafar) and adding a flying carpet.

"The flying carpet has personality, it's one of Aladdin's sidekicks," explains Clements. "I don't think it was in any of the other versions. We wanted to have a flying carpet, certainly, because it's part of the Arabian fantasy thing, although there is no magic carpet in the actual story."

Then, there was the "Jewish American Princess" in Ashman's treatment (described bluntly by Musker as "sort of a shrew") and Aladdin's "Judy Garland / true-blue / sidekick / tomboy / girl friend," whom he takes for granted until the story's final reel, whereupon she becomes his romantic interest. The tomboy girl friend was excised, but the princess, named Jasmine, remained, though she was fashioned by the duo in the "Robin Hood-type" mold. "She's still very strong-willed and opinionated," offers Musker with a chuckle. "She isn't whining to Daddy about bounced checks or getting her nails done."

Clements says that he and Musker "really liked" Ashman and Menken's early score for the film, and "fortunately, some of the songs seemed to fit within the new version, although a couple of them didn't." Musker elucidates, "There were three songs we thought would still work, and of those songs, two are still in the movie. The other one was sung to Aladdin's mother, a song called 'Proud of Your Boy,' where he says, 'Mom, I'm going to make good someday...let me show you that I'm not this lazy, loud-mouthed layabout that you think I am.'"

Once "Proud of Your Boy" was put on story reels to show to the studio executives, Mom was dismissed by Jeffrey Katzenberg as "a zero" and dropped from the film. Musker recalls that there was "some controversy about whether or not we should just get rid of Mom and focus more on the relationship between Aladdin and Jasmine, which is ultimately what we did..."

"...which meant we lost the song. It was a really beautiful song," Clements laments. "The songs that are still in from that original version are the Genie's 'Friend Like Me' and 'Arabian Nights,' the opening title song. When we came in, there were new songs that Howard was involved with—this was maybe a year-and-a-half or so after he had written the originals."

When Ashman wrote "Friend Like Me," he envisioned the Genie as being played by a commanding black actor along the lines of Geoffrey Holder. But, as the Genie is basically a slave who yearns for his freedom, "we felt that him being black could be seen as de meaning," comments Musker. "We didn't want the Genie to be black, but we still liked Howard's song, which was written as a sort of Fats Waller tune. So, we kept the tune, but tailored it to Robin a bit more, so he could adopt different personas at different times. So, within the song, he goes from being a bluesy jazz guy to a very stuffy waiter."

Ashman also wrote a song with the rather odd-sounding title "Humiliate the Boy," in which Jafar turns the tables on Aladdin. As more story changes were made, the song lost its relevance and a new villain song was substituted (a reprise of "Prince Ali" with new lyrics by Tim Rice). When a

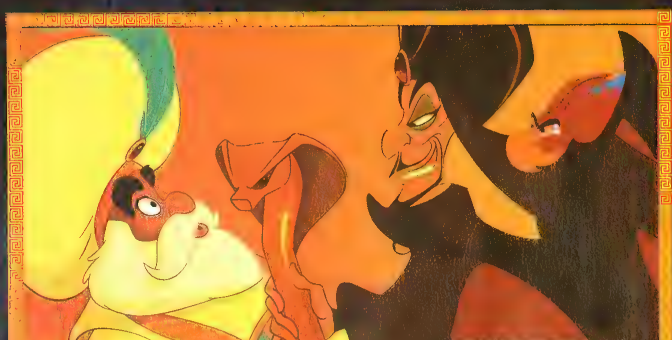
Oscar winners [illegible] Howard Ashman [illegible] with "Friend Like Me" and the other songs. After Ashman's death, Howard teamed with Tim Rice to [illegible] additional tunes.

rough version of *Aladdin* was screened for Katzenberg in April 1991, a month following Ashman's death, both "Proud of Your Boy" and "Humiliate the Boy" were still part of the score.

"We didn't know that Howard was sick during *Mermaid*," notes Clements. "Even as we started working with him again on *Aladdin*, we didn't know right away. When we went to New York to visit him—we hadn't seen him for a while—I think he knew when we saw him that we would know something was wrong. But even though he was really sick, he continued to work on the project. 'Prince Ali,' the Genie's big number, was written when he was pretty sick, and it's a great song."

Of course, not knowing if Williams could sing was a source of major concern for all involved, but even Ashman was eventually won over by the casting of the *Fisher King* star. Recalls Clements, "When we were writing our script, we were thinking Robin. That's unusual, because normally we're not real big on big-name voices. But in this case, in terms of what you could do an-

Originally a dog in earlier scripts, Aladdin's sidekick, Abu, became a monkey. Later, the Genie turned him into an elephant.



The two baddies from the original tales became one, Jafar (voiced by Jonathan Freeman, animated by Andreas Deja), the sorcerer to bewitch the Sultan.

mation-wise, we pictured the Genie as a shape-changer, and we wanted him to also be a shape-changer vocally. There didn't seem to be anybody who could do that sort of thing as well as Robin.

There was, briefly, some question as to whether or not Williams would accept the role, which put Musker and Clements' entire script in jeopardy. "If we hadn't gotten Robin, I think we felt we would have to rewrite the whole concept, because it wouldn't have worked [with another actor]," explains Clements.

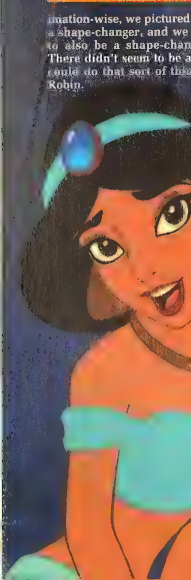
One question often posed to the directors concerning Williams' is how much of his performance was improvised and how much was scripted. "In his introductory lines, the Genie says, 'What would you wish of me...the ever-impressive, the often-imitated, but never-duplicated Genie of the lamp?' That was a line we wrote and in fact, it was stolen from Johnny Vallant, some cheesy wrestler guy who used to use that line.

"So when Ed [Gombert, storyboard artist] storyboarded it, he did a different visual joke on each one of those phrases. On 'ever-impressive' he did a big muscle guy, and on 'the often-imitated,' he did a little ventriloquist puppet, and for the 'never-duplicated,' he had the Genie multiplying into multiple Genies. When Robin saw the muscle guy, he went into this 'Arnold' [Schwarzenegger] kind of thing, and when he saw the ventriloquist bit, he did a Señor Wences-type thing."

Musker credits supervising animator Eric Goldberg (GS #30) with "developing the Genie's character and "selling Jeffrey" on the idea of using Williams. "Jeffrey was nervous about him being too comical, so Eric took one of Robin's comedy albums and did a little piece of animation to it. We showed it to Jeffrey and he said, 'Yeah, let's go try and hire Robin' based on that."

Goldberg was present at most of Williams' recording sessions. Afterwards, he, Musker and Clements would wade through Williams' many takes to find the pearls that would serve as springboards for the final animation. "Ron and I would get together with Eric, with all the takes transcribed," smiles Musker. "It was just a *mountain* of material. We decided to boil it down to the funniest stuff, without worrying about continuity, just what made us laugh. It was heavily involved in picking the takes. He would create visual jokes based on Robin's tracks."

"Every step of the way, [the character] was embellished," adds Clements. "It was designed so we could do that. It was free-form. The Genie is a stand-up comedian; that's his persona. He's trying to be entertaining, he likes getting reactions from Aladdin, so there's some justification story-wise as to why he's on most of the time. But he also has this other more sensitive side to his personality, and his feelings can get hurt easily. So, you get these two sides: This showman-type guy, and then you get a little glimpse of the guy underneath.

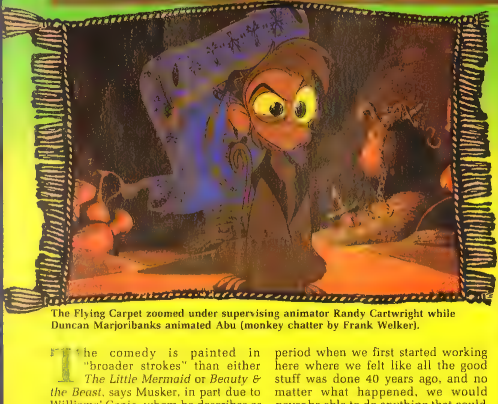


Animated in a "Robin Hood-type" mold by Mark Henn, Princess Jasmine was voiced by Linda Larkin. Lea [*Miss Saigon*] Salonga sang "A Whole New World."

Supervising animator Glen Keane led the team responsible for Aladdin's actions and Dinosaur's Weenie spoke for the hero; Brad Kane sang.

All Aladdin Art & Photos Copyright 1992 The Walt Disney Company

Conjuring up the Genie's magic was supervising animator Eric Goldberg and his team, illustrating Robin Williams' vocal antics.



The Flying Carpet zoomed under supervising animator Randy Cartwright while Duncan Marjoribanks animated Abu (monkey chatter by Frank Welker).

"The comedy is painted in "broader strokes" than either *The Little Mermaid* or *Beauty & the Beast*, says Musker, in part due to Williams' Genie, whom he describes as "over the top. Generally, things are more extreme in this movie. It's also, by its nature, a little lighter. We want you to get caught up in the story, but it isn't quite as 'life or death' and may not cut quite as deep emotionally [as *Mermaid* or *Beauty*]. But there are other things that you get in return."

"It's an exciting time for animation," opines Clements, gracefully switching the subject. "We've both been at Disney quite a while; there was a period when we first started working here where we felt like all the good stuff was done 40 years ago, and no matter what happened, we would *never* be able to do anything that could really compare to the great stuff that came before.

"But something happened in the last few years—with *Roger Rabbit*, *Mermaid* and *Beauty & the Beast*—that made it feel as if some barriers were breaking down and that there's still potential in this medium. Certainly, the talent pool has risen. The quality of animators that we have—state-of-the-art might be one [way to describe them]. The future seems exciting; we're in a new cycle of expanding the medium."

A reference is made regarding a story about the film in the trade paper *Variety*, which describes *Aladdin* as "completely different" from any other animated film made at the studio. Explains Clements, "I do think this isn't a film that would have or could have been made in the '40s. It's a film 'of its time,' and we wanted that, to a degree. We wanted a timeless quality to it—we definitely didn't want the film to be something that would be obsolete in a few years."

"This is a 'Baby Boom' movie, for better or worse," Musker points out. "With us being in our '30s, and Robin being relatively our age, there's this cultural cross-referencing in this film that really hits home to people like us who grew up on television."

While undeniably a Disney movie, *Aladdin* forges its own territory in terms of its look, Musker believes. "Certainly, past Disney pictures have tried to hew their own stylistic approach within the Disney umbrella. People in-house know that *Alice in Wonderland* doesn't look like *Pinocchio*, which doesn't look like *Snow White*. Likewise with this film. The staff can certainly see the difference between this and *Beauty & the Beast* in terms of its two-dimensional background design elements and character designs. But whether or not the moviegoing public can really see a marked difference, I don't know."

What further sets *Aladdin* apart from its two immediate predecessors—aside from the fact that the film takes place in what Clements calls a "specific, stylized world"—is that the film utilizes a more saturated color palette. "In *Fantasia*, they used a similar approach," Musker reveals. "There isn't as much black in this movie. When you go into shadow in this movie, the shadows have color.

"They're either blue or they're warm shadows; they aren't just black or greyed-down versions of the same colors. Richard Vanderwende, the production designer, and Bill Perkins, the art director, really wanted to go for a saturated color palette. So, if you stuck us next to *Beauty & the Beast*, that film may look more muted, more 'storybook,' to hark back to *Snow White*. We've gone the other way, to go with a bolder palette."

Vanderwende, who came to *Aladdin* from Industrial Light & Magic, is the first production designer to work on an animated Disney feature from beginning to end. He was already at work on the film when Musker and Clements arrived.

"As I mentioned, there was a certain amount of visual development that had been done, including a series of paintings by Richard that we saw and got really excited about," says Clements. "It was something we had talked about before seeing Richard's paintings: Making a movie that was a combination of a two-dimensional graphic style and three-dimensional lighting and overlay within that. There's something unrealistic about everything in the movie, and yet it's believable. It feels like real space that you can enter, and yet it's not real.

"The way Richard uses light is really unique. When we saw those paintings, we were really inspired by them. So, we worked with Richard from the very beginning [of our involvement], and he stayed with the movie."

A squawking scene-stealer, Iago (fowl voice by Gilbert Gottfried, parrot animation by Will Finn) understudied evil with Jafar.

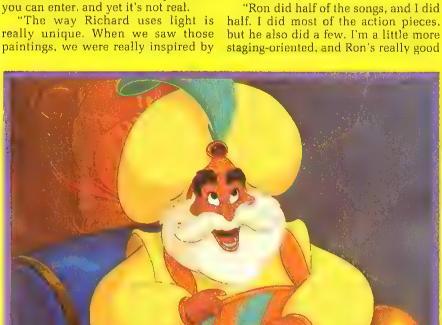
As per usual, Musker and Clements split *Aladdin's* sequences among them so that the labor-intensive production would flow more smoothly. Says Musker of their modus operandi, "We've discovered through past pictures that it helps to divide the film into sequences and supervise them [individually]. It gives us a little more pride of ownership. Maybe, too, there's a little competitiveness between us, although not much.

"Ron did half of the songs, and I did half. I did most of the action pieces, but he also did a few. I'm a little more staging-oriented, and Ron's really good in terms of the sincere, emotional scenes. So when you want insincerity, I usually do it, and when you want sincerity, you bring in Ron," Musker laughs.

Witnessing audience reaction to *Beauty & the Beast* before its official opening was, the directors admit, enough to give them cold feet. "It was really horrifying to be at various screenings where that film got a standing ovation," offers Musker. "We were at the wrap party afterwards and we saw Jeffrey, and he walked up and said, 'Now you know what they felt like following *Mermaid*.' But this was before *Beauty* had been released in theaters, so it wasn't even based on any awards. Watching it with an audience and seeing the reaction it got, we were pretty intimidated."

"But," interjects Ron Clements, "there was a good thing that came out of it, too, which is, as each film becomes more successful, it makes you want to push harder. As for the studio, if a movie doesn't do well, then there's a tendency to pull back [on the next one]. But, instead, there was a feeling along the lines of, 'OK, let's see if we can go further than that,' which was real encouraging."

Fantasies aside, no director sets out to make a classic, John Musker says. One is consumed only with "getting the job done and getting through it. You set out to make a film that works. Sometimes there are films that have great, great things in them that don't work, and sometimes there are films that are just OK, but everything seems to work. You can only really focus on making the film do what you want it to do and try to make it work for an audience. Beyond that, you have no control over what happens."



Dave Pruiksma animated the befuddled Sultan (voiced by Douglas Seale).

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out of the GILDED CAGE

Black Canary flies from Green Arrow's shadow.

By MICHAEL BERRY

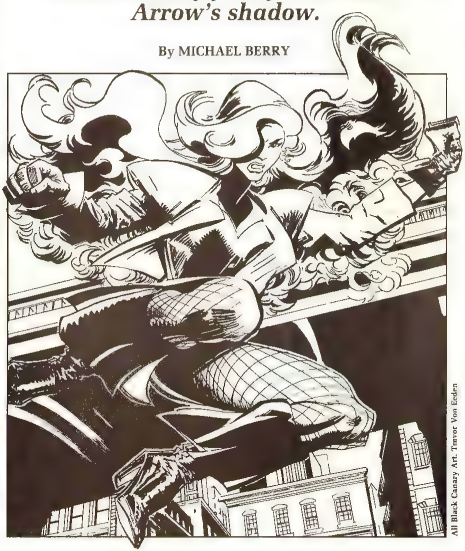
She has fought crime for more than four decades, battled bizarre villains and strange interplanetary menaces alongside Earth's greatest superheroes, and put up with plenty of nonsense from her steady boy friend, Oliver Queen, a.k.a. Green Arrow. Now Black Canary, a longtime supporting member of the DC Comics Universe, faces her greatest challenge. Can she carry her own ongoing monthly series in a market notoriously resistant to solo superheroine comics?

Based on the success of *New Wings*, last year's four-issue mini-series, Black Canary seems to have as good a shot at hitting the Comics Big Time as any female character since Wonder Woman. The creative team for *New Wings*, writer Sarah Byam and artist Trevor Von Eeden, has re-shaped her into a modern heroine with special relevance for the '90s.

The first incarnation of Dinah Lance and her alter ego, Black Canary, debuted in August 1947, in the Johnny Thunder back-up feature of *Flash Comics* #86. Created by Robert Kanigher and Carmine Infantino, the blonde crimefighter proved popular enough to merit her own feature and eventually earn membership in the Justice Society of America, the star

Photo: Courtesy Sarah Byam

***Black Canary* writer Sarah Byam has always been "interested in female characters and heroines."**



All Black Canary Art: Trevor Von Eeden

attraction of *All Star Comics*. The cancellations of *Flash Comics* in 1949 and of *All Star Comics* in 1951, however, temporarily relegated her to comics limbo. She and numerous other Golden Age heroes weren't introduced to a new generation of readers until the early 1960s.

In 1969, Black Canary joined the Justice League of America and soon became Green Arrow's lover, accompanying him on various adventures, including his acclaimed team-ups with Batman and Green Lantern. To clear up continuity problems, it was decreed that this Black Canary, Dinah Laurel Lance, was actually the daughter of the original Black Canary, Dinah Drake Lance. Her talents included martial arts expertise and a vocal shriek capable of shattering objects at a distance.

Black Canary came into her own with 1987's *The Longbow Hunters*. Mike Grell's darker and grittier approach to both Green Arrow and Black Canary firmly rooted the characters in the "real world." Dinah was even subjected to a session of brutal torture that left her emotionally scarred and robbed of both her sonic power and the ability to bear children. Since then, she has played an important, if always secondary, role in *Green Arrow*.

Byam, whose comics writing credits now include the critically-acclaimed *Billi 99* mini-series from Dark Horse, had the opportunity to explore Black Canary's psychology while working for a year as Grell's assistant.

"As a young adolescent, when I read comics or any other kind of fiction, I was always interested in female characters and heroines," Byam says. "I *always* liked Black Canary because she was shrewd and stood up for herself.

"As I got older and started to research her history, I read many of Black Canary's early stories and realized she was patterned after the film industry's 'smart cookie,' gun-moll type from the '40s. I've always been attracted to that archetype."

Like many readers, Byam may have appreciated Black Canary more for her potential than for the way her character was actually handled. "When Black Canary appeared in the Justice League stories," Byam explains, "the guys who wrote them were sensitive enough to include her in the action, but they really didn't know what to do with her. She spent a lot of time saying, 'Yeah, me too!' or, 'What's the matter with you, buster? Don't you think a woman can stand up for herself?' "

Black Canary's rather lame superpower didn't help matters, says Byam: "Being able to scream and break things really doesn't translate visually. Her writers were at a loss with what her function in a superhero group *should* be."

Teamed with penciller Von Eeden, best known for his work on *Black Lightning*, and inker Dick Giordano, Byam put Black Canary squarely at center stage in the *New Wings* mini-series, embroiling her in an action-filled plot involving neo-Nazis and cocaine smugglers. Judging by reader response, there were many who were glad to see Black Canary in more than her usual supporting role.

Byam says, "I got a ton of letters. The reaction was supportive and excited. I heard from people who've always wanted to share their hobby with their significant others. I got many letters from women who hadn't been introduced to comics before and from female fans who were just thrilled to see a woman featured in a modern story as realistic as ours." She laughs. "I even got a note from one person who said she was passing out copies for Halloween! That was very gratifying and made me happy."

The writer intends to bring a new, more feminist sensibility to the Black Canary: "As a woman, I necessarily see the character a little bit differently. If the central character of a story is male, many of the men who write comics frequently turn the female character into a kind of symbol, rather than treat her as a three-dimensional person. My approach to Black Canary will be much more multi-faceted, even if that means making Green Arrow function more as a symbol. In order for the series to remain Black Canary's own book, Green Arrow simply can't be as central to the plots as she is."

It's important for Black Canary "not to sit back and be helpless," says the writer.

All Black Canary Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 DC Comics Inc.

One question Byam plans to answer is: What does it mean to belong to a family with a tradition of superheroics? In one of Byam's first comics assignments, an eight-page backup story in *Green Arrow Annual #2*, she was able to deal directly with the mother-daughter relationship between two generations of Black Canaries. But while the elder Dinah Lance has since died, the lessons she taught her daughter still have a strong impact.

Byam says, "In the first two issues of the new series, I deal a little with the fact that Dinah's mother didn't want her to be a superhero. I show how idealized being a superhero was 15 years ago. That was when her mother first saw crimefighting starting to turn into something not quite as clean as it had once been."

Today's world is much more cynical and vicious than the one in which the original Black Canary operated. That memory of an idealized past is contrasted with the reality of what Black Canary must deal with now. As Byam says, "Dinah must renew her own commitment to being a superhero while facing many of the things her mother wanted to protect her from."

The first three issues involve a mystery with echoes from Black Canary's past. Street people in certain sections of Seattle are dying from a particular kind of alcohol poisoning. Someone has been slipping them lethal "Mickey Finns." It appears to Dinah as if this is being done specifically to reduce the city's "undesirables."

As Black Canary unravels the mystery, she uncovers parallels between it and her very first case. According to Byam, "We get to see what it was like for Dinah Lance in her first attempt to be a superheroine, and the difference between how she was able to accomplish things when she was 15 and how she does it now."

Byam also plans to spend a fair amount of time exploring Black Canary's relationship with Green Arrow. "They're getting ready to go through some hard times."

All couples have their difficulties, but with Dinah and Oliver, the chal-

After tackling ordinary bad guys in her first few issues, things get hairy quickly for Black Canary.

lenges are immense. Byam ticks off a partial list: "There's an age difference between them, and that's sometimes a problem. She has been supporting him financially for a few years. He takes the liberty of going all over the country whenever he wants to. He has been self-absorbed. That all takes its toll on a relationship.

"But Dinah really loves Ollie. She's going to work very hard at trying to make herself visible to him as a three-dimensional, adult person."

However, Byam admits, "I don't know where the relationship is going from there. I don't expect that they're going to break up, but that tension is definitely going to be explored."

Even though both Black Canary and Green Arrow have been members of the Justice League of America, *Green Arrow* isn't really tied closely to the DC Universe. Byam says, "As I tried to show in *Green Arrow Annual* #5, Oliver Queen doesn't have a good relationship with the superhero community. He isn't comfortable with superheroes or supervillains. He's better dealing with life in a personal, lone-wolf vigilante sort of way."

Byam says that Dinah feels much closer than Oliver to the superhero community and may serve as a liaison between them. "It makes sense for the *Black Canary* series to be closer to the DC Universe, but not immediately. It doesn't seem appropriate to have the book be so different from *Green Arrow* right at the beginning."

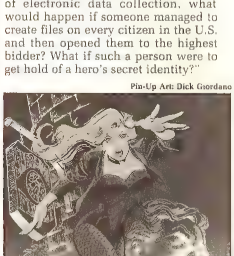
Nevertheless, Byam says there are characters in *Black Canary* who are connected to a network of villains that will eventually be a threat to the rest of the heroes in the DC Universe. The first few issues of *Black Canary* will establish only the ordinary villains of Seattle—the normal, two-bit hoods. But soon after, Byam will introduce Klik, a master assassin obsessed with disguises and gadgets. He will emerge as a recurring foe for Black Canary.

"Klik's not a supervillain," says Byam, "but he's a cut above the straight-out street thugs. He uses spring-loaded clips to produce weapons from his wrists, ankles and anyplace else he can stash a projectile or handgun. He's especially fond of throwing knives and grenades."

Byam will also eventually introduce a female villain named Blynde, who is related to Klik and has some very modest superpowers. Blynde will help tie *Black Canary* more closely into the DC Universe.

Not wanting to give too much away, Byam's description of how that link will be forged is intentionally vague: "Essentially, in the United States, there is a perceived constitutional right to privacy. Theoretically, it's protected by a number of Supreme Court decisions. If we do not have this right in this age of electronic data collection, what would happen if someone managed to create files on every citizen in the U.S. and then opened them to the highest bidder? What if such a person were to get hold of a hero's secret identity?"

Pin-Up Art: Dick Giordano



"For the series to remain Black Canary's own book, Green Arrow can't be as central to the plots as she is," says Byam.

Byam's plans for *Black Canary* sound ambitious. But will the character attract a sufficiently large readership to guarantee that she'll keep her title long enough to meet her chroniclers' aspirations?

"Maybe I shouldn't say this," Byam says, "but I think it'll be harder to get readers to pick up the book in the first place than it will to get them to *continue* to read it. Perhaps some fans will be afraid it's going to be a wimpy book.

(continued on page 58)

CAPED FEAR

When "Batman Returns," Wesley Strick polishes the night.

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

Nestled deep in the Hollywood Hills lies Wesley Strick's home, formerly fitness king Jack LaLanne's old manse, a fact of which the writer is perversely proud. Strick's office in the sprawling house is a stark, white room with barren walls, except for Robert De Niro's glaring eyes from a framed poster of his film, *Cape Fear*. ("That poster scares my kids," he laughs.)

Although the lanky 38-year-old has had a relatively short career, he has already written or co-written an impressive amount of suspense films, including *Arachnophobia*, *Final Analysis* and *True Believer*. "My sons Jake, five, and Sam, four, haven't seen any of my movies, and they're very frustrated by that. My five-year-old asked, 'Dad, when are you gonna write a movie that's *not* scary?' "

Strick also works as a "script doctor," taking scripts and prepping them for filming. Generally, he adds character motivation, clarity or exposition, like adding a funeral scene to Julia Roberts' *Sleeping With the Enemy*, which gave the film a sense of loss it might otherwise have lacked.

Although not credited in the final print, Strick also did a "production polish" on *Batman Returns* (whose script is credited to Dan Waters and story to Waters and Sam Hamm). "The problem was that they didn't have an agenda for the Penguin," he recalls. "They needed to know, 'What does he really want?' and I came up with kidnapping children.

"Because Penguin was cast into the sewer by his parents, he's filled with rage at the children of Gotham City, and he wants to bring them the same fate. [The producers] also fell behind schedule early on in the shoot, and they were looking for trims. One of the cuts was Robin. A month into shooting, they said, 'Do you think it's possible to lose Robin? It would save us four or five days!' "

Strick actually visited Gotham City. "I only live 10 minutes from where they shot the film, so I would come to the set and watch them shoot. It was fun. I saw a lot of Danny [DeVito] and Michelle [Pfeiffer] working. Michelle's mylar catsuit was highly flammable," he reveals. "Whenever she was in the suit, there was a Warners Fire Marshal whose job was to sit 10 feet away from Michelle and make sure she didn't burst into flames!"

He also made minor changes for the actors: "Danny DeVito made me take out every reference to his character being small," Strick says. "If somebody said, 'Who's that little guy over there?' he made me take out the word 'little.' I finally went to my computer, said, 'Find "little," ' and deleted it. He was right; there were a lot of them—14 references—and they're *all* gone. The line, 'My heart is filled with love—I feel five feet tall,' is the only short joke left in the movie.

"Michelle refused to say one line I wrote," Strick grins. "She refused to say, 'It was the purr-fect crime!' She felt it was *too* Julie Newmar-ish. Dan [Waters] Catwoman is more of a feminine anarchist; she wants to upset the status quo in Gotham City and turn everything topsy-turvy in her rage against society.

"Also, I created a new character who barely speaks—the Organ Grinder [Vincent Schiavelli of *Ghost*]. Tim Burton felt the Penguin needed a henchman. I also added the film's last line. It originally ended with Bruce in a dark mood after the finale, as Alfred drove

him home in the Rolls. To buoy his spirits, Alfred says, 'It's Christmas. Peace on Earth, good will toward men.' Bruce moodily stares out the window and says, 'Sure!' and the movie ends.

"I didn't want it to end on a cranky note, so now, after he has fallen in love with Catwoman, *Bruce* says, 'Peace on Earth, good will towards men—and women.' I think that's better. It gives you a nice feeling and changes the mood, ending on a note of hope and romance. That's satisfying to me; to make a small change with a large effect."

Strick admits that he "wasn't a real fan of *Batman*. When I took the job, I thought I would have to pretend around Tim that I loved it, but I found out very quickly that *he* doesn't love the first movie either. He wanted to apply some lessons he had learned in the sequel. I thought the first film was boring and unpleasant.

"Tim, like Marty Scorsese, is very self-effacing; neither of them seems to think of himself as a genius, or say, 'Don't interfere with my inspiration!' Both actively solicited my contributions, and were very, very honest about things like, 'I don't know what to do here. What do you think?'

"On the set, I heard Tim say to the cameraman, 'What do we do?' He was at a loss. A lesser director would never say that on a set for fear he would be identified as an incompetent. Tim, for whatever reason, has the confidence to admit he's feeling insecure. Marty's the same way. It's a good lesson."

Strick wants all the lessons he can get, as he's now embarking on his directorial debut. "It's my script at Universal. It merges two genres that haven't been merged before and on the surface, don't seem like a good fit: Fantasy *à la Field of Dreams* blended with *film noir*, which is a passion of mine.

"I call it a *film noir* fairy tale, and it lets me indulge my darkest paranoid/sexual obsessions. *Film noir* is essentially tragic. If the hero's not dead at the end, he's fatally compromised. The fantasy element allows me to have the best of both worlds, because my hero—who has certain paranormal abilities—goes down the *film noir* path to doom, but at the last moment, gets to shuck off his tragic destiny and transcend it magically," he smiles. "It starts like *D.O.A.* and ends like *E.T.*"

Called *The Gift*, Strick's film deals with a hero born with a supernormal ability, "but to him, it's a burden. I thought of it while working on *Batman*. The pop culture convention is that a kid who discovers he has super powers becomes a crimefighter. That's almost *always* the case, unless he's villainous—then he becomes a super-villain. He's always involved in stopping crime or committing it. *Why* should that be the case? It seems to me that if the average neurotic—like myself—discovered around puberty that he had strange abilities, he would be freaked out and might just as easily hide them as develop them. Rather than creating a rich double life, it might end up shrinking your life, as you try to hide these abilities.

"We open the movie with a 30-year-old guy who has done nothing with his life. We find out he's a superman hiding his powers from the world, because he's threatened by what they might mean. Is he not human? He gets manipulated, but discovers he has the ability to do something about it."

Photo: Pat Jankiewicz

Wesley Strick's script for Martin Scorsese's *Cape Fear* frightened folks, while the poster "scares my kids."

One might imagine Strick as a comic book fan. Nope. "I read them, but not more than any other kid," he admits. "Tim [Burton] was the same way; he *wasn't* a comic book fanatic. People have a misconception that he was a Batman-freak, but I don't think he knew much about *Batman* until the first film."

Strick's association with Batman also appears in his next rewrite job, which will have Jack Nicholson howling at the Moon. "I'm just starting a new rewrite on a fantasy film called *Wolf*," he reveals. "Jack's attached, and Jim Harrison wrote the first draft. It's about a guy who gets bitten by a Carpathian wolf pup and finds, to his great surprise, that he's slowly developing wolf-like characteristics.

"It's not a genre 'werewolf film' *per se*. There's stuff in it about the Moon that I want to get rid of—he's turning into a wolf, *not* a werewolf. It's grad-

According to Strick, Michelle Pfeiffer's flammable mylar catsuit could have made Catwoman and Batman's (Michael Keaton) relationship even hotter.

Cape Fear Photos Phillip Caruso Copyright 1991 Universal City Studios Inc.

Despite appearances, Strick couldn't write *Cape Fear* "as a macho contest" between Robert De Niro and Nick Nolte.

ual, with him slowly becoming nocturnal. At night, he tends to exhibit more wolflike characteristics.

"Many wolf qualities enhance his life," the writer adds. "He becomes more powerful, faces down corporate enemies, finds the truth about his marriage and his cheating wife: His sense of smell leads him to her lover. That's really neat. Then, things start to turn darker. The wolf begins to overwhelm his human qualities, and he's concerned that he's becoming dangerous to the people he loves."

The UC Berkeley grad's career began in an offbeat way, having "worked as a journalist for *Rolling Stone* for a few years, writing record reviews and interviews. I never became a really important rock critic, because I never had my heart in it," he confesses. "I couldn't figure out how else to describe a lead singer other than 'He stalked the stage.' I must have written that about 40 times!

"A college friend who had success selling scripts, Howard Franklin, took me to lunch one day and encouraged me to try it. He said it was easier to break into than New York publishing, and," Strick laughs, "he was right! On the way home, I bought a Syd Field book, *Screenplay*, read it and wrote my first script, *Final Analysis* (which eventually starred Kim Basinger and Richard Gere)."

After a writing gig on the James Woods film, *True Believer*, his big break came. "Steven Spielberg

Thanks to director Tim Burton, Strick has a toy Batmobile in his driveway, but he'd be better off taking the Batmissile on the Hollywood Freeway.

sought me out for *Cape Fear*. All screenwriters wait for the moment when Spielberg calls," he says happily. "My day came when his people called and said, 'Steven wants you to write *Cape Fear*.' "

Although Strick knew of the original *Cape Fear*, "I had *never* seen it. They said it's about a convict who comes out of prison in the South to take revenge on a lawyer. This didn't seem like my kind of thing. There was a climax on a river. I don't know anything about rivers or the South, so the whole Gothic milieu was foreign to me.

"I looked at the film, but wasn't taken with it. I liked Robert Mitchum, but it wasn't for me, so I passed, 'No thanks. Tell Steven I'm very flattered.' They called back and said, 'Steven himself wants to talk to you.' I didn't want to offend Spielberg. I imagined he thought highly of the original, so I took the tack that I wasn't the right writer. That's always the safest thing to do."

The writer explodes with laughter. "I spent a half-hour eloquently explaining why I *couldn't* do it: 'I'm not an action writer,' 'I couldn't do it as a macho contest between these two guys, because I don't write macho.' He listened to everything I said, then stood up, stuck out his hand and said, 'I'm really glad to have you aboard!' Next thing I knew, I was shaking his hand saying, 'Me, too!' I drove home thinking, 'What happened?' "

After Robert De Niro agreed to play Max Cady and directors Brian De Palma and Ron Howard couldn't get it started, Spielberg approached Scorsese. "Marty thought the script was a little too contrived, a conventional Hollywood thriller. When he finally agreed to develop it, we had a long meeting. He essentially went through the script page-by-page and made me take on every 'Ambiliism' in it!"

Some fans felt the ending with the scarred, monstrous killer was remnis-

cent of *Friday the 13th*. "We were concerned that we would be ridiculed for descending to that level," Strick explains. "Critics saying, 'How far Martin Scorsese has fallen, the creator of *Raging Bull* going for cheap shock effects,' but we did it anyway!"

Strick then webbed onto his next project. "Steven was so happy with my first draft of *Cape Fear* that he recommended me to rewrite *Arachnophobia* for Kathy Kennedy and [director] Frank Marshall. They were already in production and had shot that prologue [where they find the

Arachnophobia Photo: Relph Nebaum/Copyright 1990 Hollywood Pictures Company & Amblin Entertainment

All Batman Returns Photos: Trademark & Copyright 1992 DC Comics Inc./Courtesy Warner Bros.

Unlike Batman, Strick listened when Danny DeVito "made me take out every reference to his character being small."

Strick thinks audience's fear of spiders bugged them too much, preventing them from seeing *Arachnophobia*.

spider] in Venezuela. They closed down for the holidays and I rewrote the movie really fast over Christmas.

"To my mind, Frank's the nicest guy in Hollywood. He had done a lot of second-unit directing on Spielberg's movies, especially on the *Indiana Jones* series. Frank did extensive work on the action sequences. If they had a shot that involved 1,000 rats, they would give it to Frank. He enjoys that sort of thing."

As for what Strick did on the spider epic, he notes, "This gives you insight into the Hollywood script development process and why so many movies are lousy. When they sent me the material for *Arachnophobia*, it was 14 scripts. I'm *not* exaggerating. I read the first one and the last one. The first draft is always the best. It was raw, and there was a lot wrong with it, but it was scary, and there was some humor.

"By draft 14, there was *no* humor and *no* suspense. It was complete exposition, because studio notes are always about making things clearer: 'We have to understand how spiders mate

(continued on page 58)

DEATH TRAPS

If violence is appropriate, Steven Grant's in on the action.

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

Steven Grant is an extremely unpretentious comic book writer. He chose his occupation because "you don't have to shave." He has written for such literary legends as Tom Swift and the Hardy Boys (under pseudonyms). "You tell people you write for the Punisher, they go, 'Eh?' " he observes. "Tell 'em you write for the Hardy Boys, and they go, 'Wow!' "

While he has penned everything from *Marvel Team-Up* to the brilliant and offbeat *Badlands*, he's probably best known as the man who brought back the Punisher. His popular 1988 mini-series (drawn by Mike Zeck and John Beatty) revived the Punisher and such forgotten Marvel foes as Jigsaw and the Maggia, and its success estab-

Art: Mike Zeck

lished the anti-hero as one of Marvel's top sellers.

"The Punisher was viewed by Marvel as a character they didn't want *anything* to do with, only to use when they had a goofy story. They were a little afraid of him," Grant explains. "In the mid-70s, he had a couple of solo episodes in black-and-white magazines they were pushing at the sweaty men's market. By and large, the attitude towards him was expressed in some *Spectacular Spider-Man* issues, where Punisher went completely psychotic and started gunning down jaywalkers. It seemed to me that Marvel wasn't really in step with what was going on elsewhere in popular culture, and they really didn't understand their own character.

"I had been trying for a few years to get a *Punisher* mini-series off the ground, and Mike Zeck came off *Secret Wars* and wanted to redeem himself. I called him up when he and John Beatty were talking about doing another project. They both wanted to do *Punisher*. We had the same take on him," the scribe says happily.

"Once Mike got on board, it was easy to get an editor involved, although [then-editor-in-chief Jim] Shooter was a little leery. He told Carl Potts, 'You can do it if you want, but it's your responsibility!' The sales department wasn't at all pleased. One person there said Marvel's audience had *no* interest in the adventures of a maniac who kills people! There was talk of cancelling it because the concept was morally offensive to some people.

"They really didn't promote the first issue. It was an uphill battle getting the mini-series out. They did it to appease Zeck, as he had proven himself a 'good boy' with *Secret Wars*—they wanted to keep him happy so he wouldn't jump to DC. The first issue [sold out] in three hours, their tune changed, and they suddenly thought an ongoing *Punisher* series was a *good* idea."

Despite his success with the Punisher, it seems odd that Grant wasn't tapped to write the regular series. "Marvel and I had a falling out, and it wasn't considered a good idea to do the book, but I'm doing him now," he notes. "While I'm writing for him, I haven't taken over a regular book yet, because they're shifting gears at the moment."

Grant's return to the Punisher came about when "I did a Punisher Christmas story last year. I kept him in character, Klaus Janson drew it, [*Punisher* editor] Don Daley read it and said, 'Why isn't this guy writing *Punisher*?' "

The writer has enough action planned to keep the vigilante busy. "I've done two arcs and a Christmas

Badlands Characters & Art: TM Marvel & Copyright 1991 Steven Grant & Vincent Giarrano

"The world falls into two categories regarding *Badlands*," writer Steven Grant maintains. "Those who haven't read it and those who love it."

story for *The Punisher Holiday Special*. The new holiday story is 'Red Christmas,' about how he spreads peace and joy in the holiday time," he reveals. "There's a three-part arc appearing in *Punisher*, 'Dark Judgment.' The Mob wants him to track down and kill a serial killer for them. I also just finished a four-parter called 'Tournament of Blood,' which introduces the Punisher's deadliest enemy, a villain he's unable to kill. He's the new Hitman."

The previous Hitman was last seen in *Amazing Spider-Man* #176, when he fell off the Statue of Liberty. "This is a new guy with a new costume," Grant

"What I like about Punisher isn't his gun use, but his attitude," the writer says. "He doesn't just gun people down."

Punisher Character & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Marvel Entertainment Group Inc.

stresses. "Punisher doesn't kill the Hitman for reasons you'll find out in the story. It's very convoluted, and I like convoluted stories!

"I'm also working on a one-issue story which people on computer bulletin boards have been asking me to do," he relates. "Rather than having the Punisher narrate everything, I have a story through the eyes of a guy he's hunting down. The story's called 'Last Confession,' and I came up with a surprise ending for it."

Grant credits his storytelling techniques to Batman writer/editor Denny O'Neil. "Denny taught me the standard way of plotting comics. Denny said if you have to have to have a story in tomorrow and can't think of anything, put in two fight scenes, a chase and a weird villain, and it will be published, because that's the superhero comics formula.

"My plots run along the lines of taking as many people as you can, starting them in orbit around each other so that different paths keep crossing, and then collapsing the orbit until people start falling out," he says. "You finally have a group clustered and they shoot it out. Whoever wins is the hero. That's the formula to 'Tournament of Blood.' "

So far, Grant isn't bored by the prospect of chronicling the continuing war journals of Frank Castle. "I didn't pay attention to him, so I don't feel burnt out. I wrote the *Punisher* miniseriers and the *Return to Big Nothing* graphic novel and that's all. I have my own take on him, which, from my point-of-view, is still a refreshing take. I don't read the book, because [other

All Badlands Art: Vince Giarrano/Courtesy Dark Horse

"I like doing crime comics" like Dark Horse's *Badlands*, Grant says. "But you can't sell the damn things."

Salvo Art: Pat Gabrielle/Copyright 1993 DC Comics Inc.

DC Comics' newest hero is *Salvo*, "the world's best shot," according to Grant. But "he refuses to kill"—for now.

writers') viewpoints of the character aren't going to be mine.

"If I cross into previously-charted territory, Don Daley's more than happy to tell me," he laughs. "I think that much can be done with the character that people haven't done. I have a world view invested in him. When some people do *Punisher* stories, they just say, 'Gee, he has big guns, let's have him blow up everybody!'

"What I like about the Punisher isn't his gun use, but his attitude. In my stories, he doesn't think with a gun. He's very calculating, a strategist and military man. He's always thinking, reacting and assessing on the spot. He doesn't just gun people down."

The scribe is currently working on what may be "the greatest Punisher story ever told. If we get it off the ground, the maxi-series I want to do would be the Punisher's final battle with organized crime as we know it," he reveals. "Dan Chichester tells me the Kingpin's gone, but organized crime is still there, and, in my view, organized crime is the Punisher's primary focus. I wouldn't have him fighting terrorists or independent drug dealers.

"Organized crime is what I'm bringing him back to, and the maxi-series will be the end of organized crime in the Marvel Universe. It's the Punisher's final war, which everyone is dying to read. Everyone tells me, 'Man, this is *the* Punisher story I'm waiting to see!' He's either gotta win or go to the showers."

Readers shouldn't expect to see much of the vigilante's usual second banana, Microchip."As far as I'm concerned, Chuck Dixon owns Microchip, and he's welcome to him! I've never seen the Punisher as the kind of guy who needs someone to help him," Grant explains. "He doesn't trust *anybody*. Don keeps saying, 'You can use Microchip.' They can use him in the other books, but I have no interest in using him or any regular ally for the Punisher."

Grant is currently arming a brand new gunslinger for DC: Salvo, a hero who has been described as "the Punisher as done by Lucy and Desi." The writer laughs. "The 'Lucy and Desi' concept has been scrapped. Michael Golden was the book's editor, but he left DC, and it was turned over to Paul Kupperberg, who, in conference with Dick Giordano, decided to go in a different direction.

"Basically, he's *not* going to be the Punisher, or Lucy and Desi either. It'll be much darker than the original version DC has been promoting, and it has been kicked back aways."

He took on the character because "DC asked me to do it; it wasn't my idea. Salvo comes from the old *Thriller* series by Bob Fleming and Trevor Von Eeden, from the early '80s. They wanted to revive him, but not *Thriller*, so the concept is that [those stories] were set in the future and this is now. It'll be a straight adventure book with girls, guns and guts."

Is there room for another gun-toting hero in a comics world filled with Punishers, Terminators, Deathloks and RoboCops? "Sure. He's the world's best shot. That's his gimmick, so there's room for him! He used to refuse to kill, and now," Grant laughs, "he really doesn't like it very much. If push comes to shove, he'll kill, but it has to be a *real* shove.

"I don't have any problem writing Salvo, because he's different. The Punisher defeats all of the medium's constrictions. The problem is you must have the image of character development without actually changing anything. The closest you can come to changing Spider-Man is to marry him off. The Punisher's emotionally dead, but Salvo's completely different. He's *not* a dead character."

Grant recently used his character development talents on *Badlands*, a David Lynch-ian account of who killed John F. Kennedy. "I like doing crime comics, but you can't *sell* those things," he laughs. "I wanted to do one, and Bill Marks, who had success with [publishing] *Black Kiss*, asked me if I had any ideas for a crime comic. I had read about the Kennedy assassination for 30 years, and it popped in my head one day. I pitched it as 'a crime novel set in 1963, starring the man who really killed Kennedy.' Marks, a big conspiracy buff, said, 'Go with it!'

"It was the quickest thing I ever wrote, and it was a lot of fun to do. The ending was the first thing I had. The ending's always a kick in the head for people. I usually know how my series will end *before* I start them," he explains. "That way, I can always find a way to get to the end."

Grant's *Badlands* earned critical acclaim. "The world falls into two groups regarding *Badlands*: Those who haven't read it and those who love it," he says proudly. "It was the first time I knew what I was doing in writing comics. I always felt lost before, like I was hacking my way through a forest. *Badlands* is a real turning point in terms of my work. I now know what I'm doing when I sit down and write a story. Everything clicked, the characters generated themselves and it worked out nicely."

In a strange twist of fate, on its comics shop debut, *Badlands* #1 all but died. "It was killed by Spider-Man," Grant announces. "The first *Badlands* issue from Vortex came out the same month as Todd McFarlane's *Spider-Man* #1. *Badlands* got buried. Vortex published the first issue and hit financial problems. We then went to Dark Horse."

The question arises: Should JFK's assassination be fodder for comics? "*Anything* should be fodder for comics," Grant asserts. "Why not JFK's assassination? It's the pivotal event of the 20th century. It didn't even happen to me, but it was still a pivotal event in my life!"

Some people argue that comics like *Punisher* are nihilistic and overly brutal. "They claim all readers want is a bloodbath and body count," the writer notes. "My personal feeling is that *isn't* true. They want action that's appropriate to the character. If it's a violent character, then violence is an appropriate action. I think there are many characters that are given inappropriate action in an attempt to cash in on something that's not really understood. There's not too much violence in comics, just too much badly thought-out violence.

"The general belief now is that if you give readers a character who blows all the bad guys away, they'll buy it. That's not true; many of them have gone under. The only real innovation I brought to *The Punisher* was putting him in appropriate situations.

"In the original *Spider-Man* story [*Amazing Spider-Man* #129], he was a bad guy, and from my point-of-view, he's still a bad guy. I have nothing against writing a bad guy. I would rather write a bad guy than a good guy. Good guys bore me. Writers always identify with their villains," he laughs.

(continued on page 66)

"I've just recovered *Whisper* from First Comics. There was going to be movie," Grant relates, "but it fell through."

"*Badlands* is a real turning point in terms of my work," notes Grant.

Whisper Art: Rich Larson

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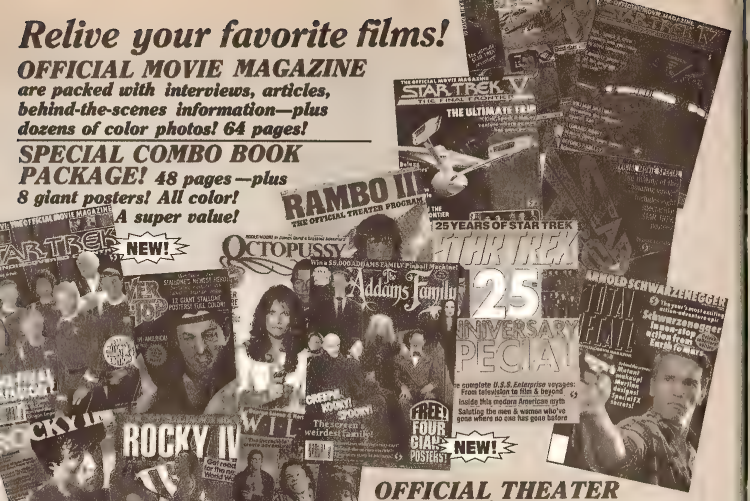

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TOUCHING HUMAN HEARTS

Don Bluth reviews cartoons past & previews an animated future.

By IAN SPELLING

Movies have to have a point—or a punchline. *That's* what attracts me to a film. I believe in dealing with the issues that humans need to deal with: Learning how to get along with each other, taking care of our planet, watching out for each other. We humans are the problem," says Don Bluth, "but we're also the solution. If I can make a movie that can inspire someone to help be part of the solution rather than the problem, that's great."

"Chanticleer overpowers everything," notes Don Bluth. "I would probably have made sure it's clear that the boy is the hero."

All Doodle Photos & Art Copyright 1992 The Samuel Goldwyn Company

Bluth, who makes his living dealing in colorful fantasies, has created a string of animated films, from *The Secret of NIMH* to the forthcoming *Thumbelina*. The animator once worked for Disney and, during two stints with the studio, helped bring to life such pictures as *Robin Hood, Winnie the Pooh and Tigger, Too* and *Pete's Dragon*. As Bluth explained in CS #11, he, Gary Goldman, John Pomeroy and several other Disneyites fled the studio in 1979 to take the type of chances Disney wouldn't allow.

Banjo, the Woodpile Cat, their first effort, was done mostly in Bluth's garage. "It was an endeavor that took us seven years to make, but it got us the attention we needed to get financing for a feature," he says, referring to *The Secret of NIMH* (which he discussed in the original CS #3), the highly-regarded story of a widowed mouse who must protect her children from several exceptionally bright rats.

"*The Secret of NIMH* did well critically, but not at the box office. I think it was an excellent picture," says Bluth. "Looking back, I like it a lot, and many of our fans think it's our best, but we thought our studio would close down because it didn't make money. We thought we failed.

"We kept ourselves alive and just tried to survive by doing video games [*Dragon's Lair, Space Ace*, etc.]. Then came Steven."

"Steven" was Steven Spielberg, with whom Bluth would team for the hit *An American Tail* (which Bluth discussed in STARLOG #114). "It wasn't the story that I would want to tell as my tale. It was very Steven. But I got behind it and said, 'I'm going to make the best of it and learn something here.' I loved *American Tail*," he declares, "and it was fun creating a new mouse, Fievel. It did well."

George Lucas joined the Bluth-Spielberg duo for *The Land Before Time*, which, despite its success, isn't one of Bluth's happier experiences. "I had a hard time," Bluth admits of the dinosaur epic. "George and Steven each had different ideas and they were each busy, so we could never get decisions or OKs and it turned out to be a very soft picture.

"We injected the dinosaur mother's death. We injected as much as we could to get some grit into it. It was so soft and talked to the lowest audience I think we've ever spoken to. All I could do was hope to put some little messages in there. Steven later said, 'Would you like to do *American Tail II*?'—but the business deal wasn't healthy enough to allow our studio to grow, so we had to pass."

In the meantime, the Ireland-based Sullivan-Bluth Studios set up a three-

***Thumbelina*, voiced by *The Little Mermaid*'s Jodi Benson, sings in Bluth's upcoming release.**

Prince Cornelius, Thumbelina's true love, must find her as she's tempted and taunted by the forest creatures.

All Thumbelina Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Don Bluth Entertainment

picture deal with Goldcrest Films. "We got two of them done before the deal fell apart," notes the filmmaker. "The first was *All Dogs Go to Heaven*. Goldcrest was very confident in us. We produced a picture that was pretty gutsy—a ballsy picture. Then came the marketing people, who said, 'You *can't* do this.' 'That won't fit.' 'Mothers will be alarmed.' 'People won't go.'

"And they began to take things out of *All Dogs*. Some critics didn't like it, and it didn't do as well at the box office.

"We were well into *Rock-A-Doodle*, which was also created to be quite sophisticated. It had things for our two audiences, children and adults. Again, marketing people said, 'Edit, edit, edit,' and I began to edit. It became softer and softer. I was editing a completed film. It was hard. Out of that, we learned who we should target our films to: Children four-to-10 *and* their parents. When *Little Mermaid* came out, we discovered a third audience we weren't getting for *All Dogs*, and that was dating couples. We've become very aware of it now, especially with the success of *Beauty & the Beast*."

The *Rock-A-Doodle* that played briefly in theaters this past spring was a lightweight, brightly-animated children's film with a few catchy musical numbers and some live-action sequences. Edmond (Toby Scott Granger), a young human boy, believes in Chanticleer, the fabled

A Troll in Central Park **is about a good deed-doing troll and, Bluth notes, "Trolls just don't do that."**

All Troll Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Don Bluth Entertainment

rooster who raises the Sun daily by crowing. Reading this story while his family struggles to save the farm during a rainstorm, Edmond calls upon Chanticleer, but the now self-doubting rooster has fled in shame because he thinks he can't really raise the Sun.

When the (Christopher Plummer-voiced) Grand Duke—a big, bad owl—hears of Edmond's effort, he transforms the live-action boy into a cartoon kitten, which brings him into Bluth's animated universe. Here, Edmond must find Chanticleer, now an Elvis Presley-like superstar (voiced by Glen Campbell), and convince the rooster that he really does raise the Sun—all before it's too late to save his family and the farm.

"I wanted to let children know the story's hero could be themselves," explains Bluth. "The film says, 'No matter how small you are, no matter how small you *think* you are, however much you think you don't count, it's just not so. You *do* count. Your ideas are needed and they are the ones that are probably the solution.' "

Rock-A-Doodle afforded Bluth a new challenge. When the director of his live-action sequences fell ill prior to lensing, Bluth replaced him.

"It was a great experience for me. I had *never* gone out and actually worked on a set where I had to deal with color, actors, lighting, costumes and atmosphere. So, I gained an appreciation for what directors go through," notes Bluth. "I would probably do it again."

On the whole, Bluth says he's satisfied with the final film (now out on video), even if it *wasn't* the film he envisioned or, for that matter, shot. "There are some parts that I think could have been better *if* we had more time. My doubts are always in the story," he admits. "It could have been more simple. I would probably have made sure that it's clear the little boy is the story's hero.

"Chanticleer overpowers everything. I would also put Edmond in more cartoon sequences. We did a little bit of that in the end credits. It's more imaginative for him to go into the rooster's world as a human boy in an animated situation."

Although Bluth gave *Rock-A-Doodle* his all and believes he created a respectable film, the experience led him to seek the sort of independence he hasn't enjoyed since the days of *Banjo*. As a result, the Goldcrest deal ended. Retitled Bluth Entertainment, the company has now gone bankrupt. Re-organization plans failed, but the three films in production may yet be finished for release by MGM.

Thumbelina focuses on a little girl who's two inches tall. Along comes a bird who tells her that everything will work out for her if she just follows her heart. Doubtful, she complains to her mother, "If only there were somebody else in the whole world who was my size." After her mother reads a fairy tale, Thumbelina asks, "Are there really fairy tales? Do fantasies come true?"

Stanley, the *Troll in Central Park*, causes a ruckus within Trolldom because of his green thumb and inherent niceness.

"That evening, a fairy prince comes into her room and finds her. They go on a wonderful spin through the skies and fall in love," explains Bluth. "They decide to meet again the next day, but she's kidnapped that night by a toad who says to her, 'You don't want to marry; with a voice like yours, you really want a career in show business.' "

Thumbelina thinks he may be right. She's tempted again by a beetle, Berkley Beetle (Gilbert Gottfried), who tells her she's the most beautiful girl in the world. The beetle, however, only wants a beautiful woman on his arm at the Beetle Ball, not someone to love. "So, flattery gets her and she forgets about true love. Then, she gets into real trouble. It's winter, everything seems to die, and she finds herself underground. She decides, 'Maybe I'll marry this mole, Mr. Mole (John Hurt), because he's very rich and can take care of me.' So, security gets her."

Says Bluth, "Thumbelina keeps forgetting the only reason to get married is love. She has to learn to follow her heart, just as the bird told her. That will lead to love, which can lead to marriage. Jodi Benson, from *Little Mermaid*, is doing the voice, and she sounds a little different in this one. Barry Manilow is doing the music."

Next up will be *A Troll in Central Park*, which follows the adventures of a good troll named Stanley (Bluth regular Dom DeLuise). All the other trolls hate him for his goodness. Worse, Stanley possesses a green thumb that enables him to grow beautiful things.

Production of Bluth's *The Pebble and the Penguin*, an animated buddy movie, has been delayed.

"Trolls just *don't* do that," warns Bluth. "They destroy things. He's such a shame to them that they ship him away from the kingdom to a place that's only steel and stone, where nothing can be grown. And that's New York. He lands in Central Park and says, 'This is a great place. I'm going to like it here!' So, he sets up home under a bridge. Later, he meets two little children, a brother and a sister. The little three-year-old girl is still innocent, but the boy is more grown up and turning fast into a troll.

"When it gets back to the *Troll Gazette* that Stanley is beautifying Central Park, the King and Queen are livid. They say, 'We're embarrassed,' and they come to the park to turn him into stone. A big war ensues, and Stanley must take care of the kids, because the trolls might get them, too. It has a happy ending."

Finally, there's *The Pebble and the Penguin*, which Bluth describes as "an enchanted tale about a penguin named Hubie (Martin Short) who's in love with Marina (Annie Golden). He's terribly shy, but he wants to give her a pebble (the Antarctica version of an engagement ring). Before he can reach her, he's knocked into the sea, pursued by a leopard seal, chased thousands of miles away from home, captured and loaded aboard a ship, where he is about to be sold. He meets another penguin, the very streetwise Rocko the rock hopper (Jim Belushi).

"They escape and become best friends, with Hubie holding onto his pebble the whole time. It turns out this is really a buddy picture. They learn from each other. Rocko learns what it is to love and how to express himself. Hubie learns how to protect himself. When they get back home, Hubie gets his girl."

Although three back-to-back projects sound like enough to keep him busy, Bluth keeps the story wheels churning at all times. He can't discuss other ideas just yet, but he notes that one possible project is the story of the three grey whales trapped beneath the frozen seas in Alaska several years ago. Bluth originally planned to make that his post-*Rock-A-Doodle* project.

"I'm still jazzed about that picture, but I can't get the script right, where it will be a property that doesn't have a million people's fingers on it. I need an *original* story there," he says. "I'm trying to work it out so we can do it free and clear. I hope we can get it done."

Every time a Bluth film hits the screen, it seems to have the misfortune of being in release alongside a Disney production which earns more money and attention.

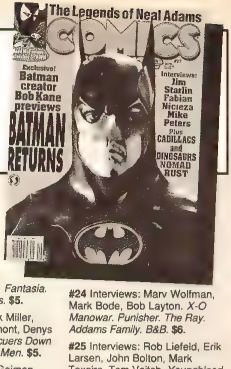
Still, Bluth feels *any* successful animated film is good for animation in general: "We think about ourselves, what we're doing, our past pictures and our audience. I'm not really concerned about Disney and what they

(continued on page 60)

"There are parts of *Rock-A-Doodle* that could have been better if we had more time," says Bluth. "It could have been more simple."

Pebble & Penguin ™ Trademark & Copyright 1992 Don Bluth Entertainment

COMICS scene



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WildStar

(continued from page 28)

past summer in different areas, I saw more young kids, which is great. A couple of years ago, retailers and publishers were worried that there wasn't an infusion of new readers, and they've certainly been bringing a lot of young faces to conventions. The market has changed so much in the last few years that I think many people are annoyed. Once there's a really big-selling book, there's a feeding frenzy, money-wise. Publishers want to rush to get stuff out, and retailers want to sell big numbers, and people decide in their own minds whether they're selling quantity or quality. I don't think anybody in a business can make that distinction very easily," says Ordway.

"Critics may get upset because *Spawn* sells so many more issues than *Doom Patrol*, but *Doom Patrol* is targeted at an audience that appreciates that book's quirky style. I can appreciate the humor in *Doom Patrol*, but someone new to comics isn't always looking for subtlety. Most Arnold Schwarzenegger movies don't work on subtlety."

Now that his *Superman* stories are coming to an end for the time being, Ordway is concentrating his attentions on *WildStar* and the writing and artwork on the upcoming, fully-painted *Shazam!* hardcover graphic novel. In fact, Ordway says one of the reasons he decided to pencil *WildStar* was to get more attention for his *Shazam!* book.

"Part of the problem is that there's a general attitude in some ways that *Shazam!* is a vanity project. I painted some of the people in the DC sales department into a corner by wanting to do a full-color hardcover project, and I realize that," he explains. "There's a limited market for *any* hardcover. Even if it's wildly successful, it's still not going to reach as many readers as the first issue of a new comic. So, knowing that I painted DC and myself into a corner with that," Jerry Ordway notes, "I haven't had any artistic presence on the stands in two years. That's another thing I'm very aware of, and I certainly hope *WildStar* can generate some interest from the segment of the market that's buying Image. I don't want to appeal to just the people who know Captain Marvel. I would like to get someone saying, 'That's pretty cool, is that a new character?' "

WildStar's future looks promising, and they already have an idea for another story.

"I came up with a different ending for the first series," says Al Gordon, "And Jerry said, 'Hold on a second. That's too good of an ending—let's do that for the *second* mini-series!' "

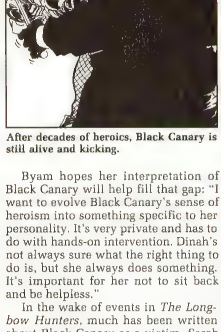
Canary

(continued from page 43)

or they have an established comics budget they don't want to change. But once they care about the characters involved, and as long as we give them well-written stories, they'll keep coming back for more."

For *Black Canary* to succeed, it clearly needs to appeal to male readers. But Byam also hopes that the protagonist can serve as a role model for a new generation of female fans.

"It may not be so obvious to the guys," she says, "but if you're a girl looking for a heroic role model and all of them are male, you have two choices. Either you start wishing you were a guy, so you can grow up strong and fight for truth, justice and the other important things you believe in. Or you start looking really hard for characters who represent those things, but still look like you."



After decades of heroics, Black Canary is still alive and kicking.

Byam hopes her interpretation of Black Canary will help fill that gap: "I want to evolve Black Canary's sense of heroism into something specific to her personality. It's very private and has to do with hands-on intervention. Dinah's not always sure what the right thing to do is, but she always does something. It's important for her not to sit back and be helpless."

In the wake of events in *The Longbow Hunters*, much has been written about Black Canary as a victim. Sarah Byam hopes to help the character achieve a new perspective on her past traumas: "What's important to me is to show how one comes out of that position of being victimized to becoming strong without being bitter or reactionary, regaining a self-confidence bonded enough in truth so that it cannot be brushed aside as an illusion."

Strick

(continued from page 47)

and what time of year they mate,' " he laughs. "You read draft 14, and you learn a lot about spiders; it was like watching *Nova*. You have to go back in and invest the story with the original thrills and humor."

Many wondered why the well-made film wasn't a blockbuster. "I know *exactly* why," the writer readily replies. "Arachnophobia is real, and many people suffer from it. I knew it was a problem, particularly with women—not to be sexist—when a couple of my wife's girl friends said, 'I would love to see his movie, but I'm too terrified of spiders.' Unlike *Jaws*, where sharks are scary but you don't walk around afraid of them, the phobia of spiders kept many people out of theaters."

Strick gave the film a happy—if shaky—ending. "I did the epilogue with the earthquake, because nobody knew how to end the movie," he laughs. "It was my idea, and they were so unsure about it that when they shot it, they called me that morning to ask, 'Are you really sure about this earthquake? Shouldn't we have one more spider?' I said, 'Nope! You're done with spiders, we've killed them all, it's time for an earthquake!' It turned out to be a fun ending. People like it."

As a script doctor, Strick tries to remain true to his patients. "One satisfaction about being a rewriter is you find things to do in a script that are already there, that the original writer hadn't discovered, but they're buried. You want to find layers under the surface. As a rewriter, I don't reach out and grab an idea out of thin air; I dig deeper underneath. I'm trying to get what's really there. It's a process of excavation.

"I always find that when they give me scripts, they're a disorganized mess," he continues. "I'm a little compulsive, and I like to clean them up and put them in order so the right things happen at the right moment."

As for the future, Strick expresses interest in working with Burton and Scorsese again. "Definitely! I want to get into directing, but any time Tim or Marty calls, I'll jump at it," he smiles.

One keepsake that Wesley Strick will always have from his work on *Batman Returns* is a toy Batmobile in his driveway. "Tim sent it to my kids and they ride it every day," he notes. "Tim called and asked, 'Are your kids gonna be home in an hour?' Next thing I knew, they pulled up with the Batmobile. I called him and said, 'Thanks, Tim. I'm gonna take it on the Hollywood Freeway,' so he said, 'Stay in the slow lane.' "

Joe Shuster—

1914-92

The illustrator who co-created the comic book superhero, one of the most quintessentially American inventions of the 20th century, was actually Canadian. Original Superman artist Joe Shuster, who died July 30 at age 78, was born in Toronto in 1914, and moved to Cleveland, Ohio 10 years later. There, he met aspiring writer Jerry Siegel; a collaboration that would ultimately reverberate through American popular culture was born.

A shared love of science fiction led Shuster to co-create numerous newspaper comic strips with Siegel; all met with swift rejection. One of the earliest was a cartoony character called "The Superman," done in 1933 and rejected by the publisher of an early comic book, *Detective Dan*. A frustrated Shuster tore up the art.

Vowing to redo the concept properly if the time ever came, Siegel and Shuster moved on. Their first professional sale came in 1935 with Dr. Occult, the Ghost Detective, which debuted in *More Fun*, a DC Comics publication, soon followed by Federal Men, Henri Duval, Radio Squad and Slam Bradley in other early DC titles.

Shuster's early work was noted for its buoyant simplicity as well as his pioneering of the splash page and other comics layout approaches still in use today, astonishing accomplishments in light of his legendary poor eyesight.

"I had to get down to about an inch above the paper in order to see the fine lines," he once admitted.

When a revised version of Superman finally sold to *Action Comics* in 1938, the strip that had been rejected so many times took the new field of comic books by storm. While Superman inspired many emulators, no variation on the superhero theme equalled the pure simplicity of Clark Kent taking off his eyeglasses and shirt to reveal the mythic figure of the costumed Superman.

Superman was Joe Shuster's greatest creation, and the artist was never again as successful with subsequent creations. As the pressure of the strip increased, he brought in ghost artists—although he often continued to render the Superman figure or face. By 1945, he had added Superboy to his chores, but litigation initiated by Siegel over ownership of the Man of Steel led to their longtime estrangement from the character beginning in 1947.

Siegel and Shuster moved on to create the short-lived *Funnyman*, and then went their separate ways. After a brief stint at Charlton Comics, deteriorating eyesight forced Shuster to stop drawing professionally in 1954. He reached a low point when, working as a messenger, he endured the humiliation of delivering packages to the thriving National Comics line, still busily cranking out lucrative *Superman* comics and merchandise.

A turning point came in 1976 when DC Comics agreed to pay Siegel and Shuster a lifetime stipend. Shuster's last published drawing was, appropriately enough, a Superman pin-up which appeared in the June 1983 issue of *Action Comics*.

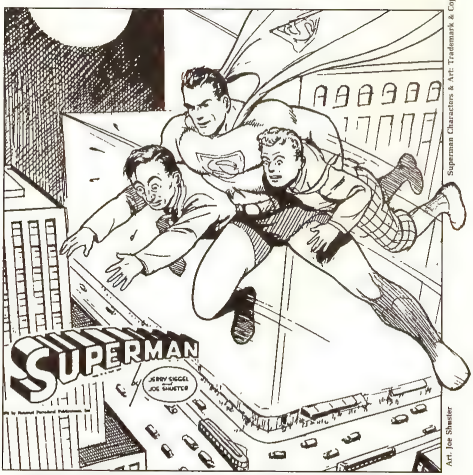
Shuster once explained that the transformation of meek Clark Kent into the invincible Superman was the heart of the character's appeal.

"It's a universal theme, and that's why so many people relate to it," he said—a quote that is likely to be as true 100 years from now as it is today.

—Will Murray

Photo Courtesy Rich Morrissey

With writer Jerry Siegel, artist Joe Shuster created Superman.



Superman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1976, 1992 DC Comics Inc.

Art: Joe Shuster

Making the Man of Steel fly was just part of Shuster's innovative artistry.

Bluth

(continued from page 56)

do. They will find their own strengths. I don't think we have the same style as they do, and we have different purposes for making a picture. I don't give it too much thought. I watch to see what our competition will be releasing, but that's about it.

"There has been a definite renaissance of animation. The audience was always there and always accepted a well-made animated film, but we forgot what we were doing. We started making films that were dishonest and *didn't* reflect the human condition."

Bluth says such films were based on formulas and designed *only* to make cash. "That's the wrong reason to make a film. Of course, films have to make money, but that shouldn't be the prime purpose. When we started making films again that connected with the human heart, which is really what it's all about, the people came out for them. If we connect with the heart, people respond and will pay to see it. The resurgence of animated films has to do with the fact that producers caught onto what people want—they woke up."

Whatever the differences between today's animated films, no one can deny Walt Disney's enduring and omniscient influence. After all, it was Disney who gracefully guided animation from crude moving drawings into an art form. It's no surprise, then, that Don Bluth cites *Bambi* and *Pinocchio* as the animated films that proved most influential in his career.

"*Bambi*, just for sheer beauty, is like a poem. I've always loved that picture. It's probably what got me started. *Pinocchio* is a parable, a capsulized version of the classic coming-of-age story. This little character sets about to meet all the temptations of life and he fails every time. Later, when he finally says, 'It doesn't matter what happens to me; I'm willing to give up my life,' you realize that you really *get* your life when you're willing to give it up.

"Animation is like a symbolic language. Like poetry, it turns on symbols. It's a crystallized, minimal language. When I look at Bambi, that's not a deer. Bambi is a little boy. He's not just *any* boy; he's a particular boy that I might know, or maybe he's me. So, that thing that looks like a deer up there on the screen is really a symbol for something much deeper. All of the characters in a true, well-animated film are just symbols for something much deeper.

"That's why I find animation so exciting and important," says Don Bluth, "and why I enjoy it so much."

Dini

(continued from page 20)

loose continuity, but when you watch the show from the beginning, you'll be able to pick up certain developments with the characters. A couple of early episodes feature Harvey Dent as Gotham City's district attorney and also Bruce Wayne's best friend. If you know about Harvey Dent in the comics, he suffers a tragic accident and becomes one of Batman's worst enemies, Two-Face. So, "Two-Face" is two of our most heartfelt episodes, where Bruce Wayne loses a friend and gains a deadly enemy.

Richard Moll plays Two-Face and Harvey Dent. He's great. When he's Harvey Dent, you really like him. I'm just sorry we didn't do half the series with Harvey Dent, because he's a very likable character. When he becomes Two-Face, he becomes frightening, and that makes his transformation all the more tragic.

We do refer to things that happen in other stories. In the story that introduces Poison Ivy, she's actually romancing Harvey Dent, whom she's trying to murder because she believes he was instrumental in a rare plant's extinction. Later, after he becomes Two-Face, he encounters Poison Ivy again ("Almost Got 'Im"). It's a funny scene when they meet: Now, he's this freakish creature, she's a villain. They get to know each other again in these circumstances, and they don't particularly like each other.

Diane Pershing voices Poison Ivy, and she's great. She came in and did this great voice, just sexy, but it was also nasty and had this undercurrent of hatefulness. It was everything that character *should* be.

In "Harley and Ivy," the Joker calls it quits with Harley and throws her out. She decides to become a crook on her own and forms an alliance with Poison Ivy, where they become far more successful criminals on their own than the Joker ever was. He's furious at this, and they have it out. Batman is in that story, too, someplace [*chuckles*]. Not so you would notice.

CS: The Joker is celebrating the holidays with his own special.

DINI: Oh yes, I worked with a very talented writer named Eddie Gorodetsky on a show where, during the holidays, the Joker preempts television and puts on his own special, "Christmas with the Joker." He's dressed up as Perry Como, with a roaring fire, he has some victims to terrorize and he's waiting for the stroke of midnight for Batman to find him. If he doesn't, well, his victims aren't going to have a very merry Christmas. That turned out to be one of the funnier ones.

CS: What other DC characters appear?

DINI: Zatanna, a sexy, talented showgirl, and a young magician. In the comics, she's the daughter of Zatarra, a classic Golden Age character. In our version, when Bruce Wayne was traveling around the world at age 16, he studied with her father and learned how to be an escape artist. After he met Zatanna, he had to leave to study martial arts. Years later, they meet after he becomes Batman, and they share an adventure, where he clears her of a crime for which she has been framed.

Julie Brown—the funny one from *Earth Girls Are Easy*—does Zatanna as comical. Vincent Schiavelli, who was in *Batman Returns* and *Ghost* [see STARLOG #187], plays Zatarra.

I would say that with our cast of characters, doing 65 half-hours, there's a chance to spotlight each throughout the show's run. There are some episodes they're barely involved in at all. In other episodes, they're really spotlighted.

CS: What about Batgirl?

DINI: Batgirl makes an appearance for two episodes. Everybody gets their chance in the spotlight. That's great. These things add richness and color to Batman's world, and I don't think you would want to see Batman going against freak-of-the-day villains. That would get old pretty quick.

If this was just Batman brooding over his parents dying, again, you would get tired of that, quick. Also, if you're just doing stories where the Joker is running crazy over every episode, why bother calling the show *Batman*? But, in the run of 65, we've done shows exactly like that. You get an even mix of what's going on, and a lot to choose from.

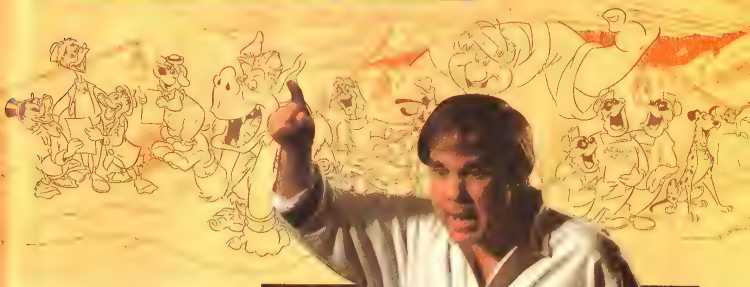
In their way, they're *all* integral parts of Batman's world. They're all the things that make up his mythos.

We did a very good story by Michael Reaves called "I Am the Night," where Commissioner Gordon gets shot when a stakeout goes bad, and Batman blames himself: "Oh, I got there too late. I could have prevented it. It's not worth it anymore." What good has being Batman accomplished? The city's still just as bad off. He takes off the mask and cape and throws it into a crevice in the Batcave, and he gives it up.

That's a tremendous part. Kevin Conroy as Batman does a hell of an acting job. So does Bob Hastings as Commissioner Gordon, because at the end, when he comes out of the coma, he makes a speech about never giving up the fight; the work goes on; what they do is important. Although it's one of our grimmer episodes, it's a very good one. It very much affirms Batman's place in Gotham City. Although the battle is a hard one, there *are* triumphs.

SPEAKING FOR TOONS

On occasion, Will Ryan has provided the voices behind such familiar Disney faces as Scrooge McDuck, Tigger, Rabbit, Goofy and the Beagle Boys.



For Will Ryan, success lies in vocal versatility.

By BOB MILLER

Will Ryan is an ogre, a swine, a rat, a bully and a member of an animalistic youth gang. He likes bugs. He writes songs for tigers and an elephant that flies. He's handled a gnome. And he gets *paid* to do these things.

For Will Ryan, versatility means having to speak for many cartoon characters: As a swine (*Rock-a-Doodle*), a rat (*Thumbelina*), a bully and several ogres (*Gummi Bears*), in addition to being involved in a gang of animals (Petrie in *The Land Before Time*), speaking for bugs (Digit in *American Tail* and Grubby in *Teddy Ruxpin*), delivering messages (Seahorse in *The Little Mermaid*), and articulating *A Gnome Named Gnorm*.

His career started with children's theater in the third grade. He grew up in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, and by high school he became involved in rock 'n' roll. His band, Snow, released a single album on CBS Epic Records.

In college, Ryan met songwriter/musician Phil Baron. Their duo, Willio and Phillio, was "more than an act; it was a way of life.

"It was 1978. It was a really bizarre concept, what you would call 'Neo-Vaudeville.' It was a couple of guys with a ukulele and a guitar, singing—as we used to say—'The

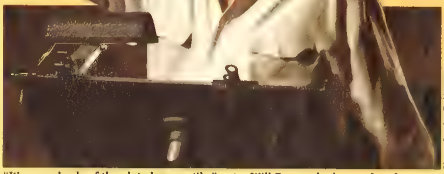


Photo: Stanley D. Newton

"It's a good rule of thumb to be versatile," notes Will Ryan, who has spoken for everything from a prehistoric pal to an over-sized ogre.

All Carol Art & Disney Characters: Copyright 1983, 1992 The Walt Disney Company

Peg-Leg Pete's *Mickey's Christmas Carol* bow as the Ghost-of-Christmas-Yet-To-Come was Ryan's first shot at a character he would reprise in other Disney specials.

Photos Copyright 1992 Animation Music

Mark Hamill, flanked by Willio (Ryan, left) and Phillio (Phil Baron), performs on the *Rainbow Patch* series, in a sort of "Neo-Vaudeville" style.

"I did two auditions at the same time," Ryan recalls. "I did a sound-alike of Juneas Matthews and then a peppier version. They preferred the peppier version, because Juneas sounded old. We did *Winnie the Pooh and a Day for Eeyore* almost radio-style. They assembled virtually the entire cast; we did it straight through a couple of times—*not* the usual Disney way of recording animation voices. They usually isolate everyone."

Then, the Disney Channel axed a proposed series starring Willio and Phillio.

"We were slated to host *The Magic Kingdom*, one hour, weekdays on the Disney Channel. At the last minute, the show was cancelled. So, this other show that I figured would take up half a day a week of my time became more important," Ryan says, "and that was *Welcome to Pooh Corner*."

Greatest Hits of the last 400 years, directly from the planet Earth, live and in person.' We would be often accompanied by characters such as Jackie K. Jackie, the Scandinavian comedian; That Crazy Ramblin' Alien, Steve Martian; and Tapioca Pudding and Her Just Desserts. We performed the never-forgettable 'Cleveland Stroll.' "

Very popular in the midwest, Willio and Phillio went to LA and contacted the producer of Disneyland Records, Jymn Magon. He liked their work. Magon was doing a follow-up album to the successful *Mickey Mouse Disco* to star Donald Duck. Ryan and Baron wrote and recorded five songs, one of which headlined the new album, *Goin' Quackers*.

However, to Ryan's astonishment, he found out that Disney no longer used Clarence Nash, Donald Duck's original voice.

"That led to a debate that went on for a few months, but ultimately Nash went on our album, which gave it veracity. I said, 'You're Disney! You *should* be using Clarence Nash.' They finally did," Ryan states.

For Disney, Ryan performed as Chip 'n' Dale for five years on five albums and on various toys—always with Clarence Nash, until Nash's death in January 1985. Ryan soon voiced characters in cartoons, the only talent to perform in every Disney featurette and character series released from 1983-88. He began with *Mickey's Christmas Carol* (STARLOG #78), voicing Willie the Giant and Peg-Leg Pete, whom he would later reprise in *Sport Goofy, Down and Out with Donald Duck* (a NBC special) and *DuckTales*. During *Carol*'s production, Ryan had been slated to do Pluto's voice, but Pluto was deleted from the picture.

After *Carol*, Ryan—who still lacked an agent—assembled a demo tape of his characters and brought it to Rick Reinert Productions in Burbank. About a week later, they called him in to audition for *Winnie the Pooh and a Day for Eeyore*. A replacement was needed for Juneas Matthews. Rabbit's original voice, who died after the second *Pooh* featurette. Ryan prepared with the help of Magon, who provided him a tape of Matthews' excerpts.

The Carpie King was only one of Ryan's many *Gummi Bears* voices.

Selected Photos & Art Courtesy Will Ryan

Ryan's other *Christmas Carol* gig was as the bumbling, but friendly, Ghost-of-Christmas-Present, Willie the Giant.

Executive producer Frank Brandt had seen Willie and Phillie perform at the Variety Arts Center, and hired them for a live-action *Pooh* series for the Disney Channel. Phil Baron voiced Piglet; Ryan reprised his role as Rabbit. However, Paul Winchell was "unavailable," so Ryan also voiced Tigger. Ryan wrote and produced songs, and occasionally sang for other characters.

Pooh Corner lasted two seasons and 120 episodes, and was followed up by another live-action children's series for Ryan, *Dumbo's Circus*, which also ran 120 episodes. Ryan voiced Barnaby, a friendly yodeling dog from Oklahoma.

After completing 40 episodes of *Dumbo's Circus*, Ryan was up for the voice of the popular comic-strip character, Ziggy. He found himself competing against Marty Ingels (an actor/agent) and Gary Burghoff ("Radar" of *M*A*S*H*). Ryan decided to get an agent. Ryan won the part, voicing Ziggy for ten 30-second shorts directed by Eric Goldberg, but the spots never aired due to legal complications.

For years, Ryan had been a Carl Barks fan, and he occasionally corresponded with him. Then, in 1984, he was delighted with the opportunity to voice Barks' characters in a new Disney short, *Sport Goofy in Soccermania*.

"I was the first one to have done Gyro, Gladstone and five Beagle Boys," he says. "I was the third one to do Scrooge. Jack Angel did another Beagle Boy. Originally, Phil Proctor, late of the *Firesign Theater*, did another Beagle Boy who was cut from the picture." Ryan also voiced Goofy (originator Pinto Colvig died in 1967).

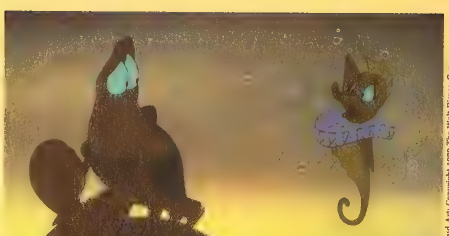
Ryan worked on 36 *Teddy Ruxpin* audiocassettes, doing major characters as well as writing lyrics, music and stories for it. He voiced Grubby in the animated *Teddy Ruxpin* while Phil Baron voiced Teddy.

In 1985, he was part of *Swabbies*, a.k.a. "the Missing Disney Film."

"The new regime had just moved into the studio, and it was [new exec] Jeffrey Katzenberg's idea to do a Mickey/Donald/Goofy version of *Stripes*, where they join the Navy. So, I was Peg-Leg Pete, the commanding officer and some crazy, nutty German professor and all six Beagle Boys. It was a pretty zany little film."

Although the dialogue had been recorded, Ryan says, "The plug was pulled on it the morning all the animation was to be handed out to freelancers. All of the designs, layouts, scene assignments and backgrounds had been done."

Like *Sport Goofy*, *Swabbies* was meant as a theatrical short. However, it was never completed. *Sport Goofy* was eventually telecast on NBC in May 1987.



A last-minute addition gave Ryan's *Little Mermaid* character, the Seahorse, more to do.

Little Mermaid Art: Copyright 1989 The Walt Disney Company

Ryan performed Uncle Scrooge and the Beagle Boys again on the two-minute pilot for *DuckTales*. He lost those parts for the series, but he did voice recurring villain Peg-Leg Pete.

In 1985, Disney began producing cartoons for Saturday morning TV, with *Wuzzles* for CBS and *Gummi Bears* for NBC. Not surprisingly, Ryan was involved with both—though he only did one episode of *Wuzzles*, while *Gummi Bears* turned out to be his longest-running series.

"The first season of the *Gummi Bears* was so much fun," Ryan says. "This was a new venture. The goal was to be better than anything else on Saturday morning. The enthusiasm that Art Vitello [producer], Jymn Magon [story editor] and the actors felt about each other was just a joy to experience. If someone wasn't in an episode, people would say, 'How come June [Foray]'s not in this one? Well, that's terrible. Write her in.' Nowadays, the writers are directed to keep the cast small, and you have many adventures where four or five Gummi Bears stand around and blink, while two of them do all the talking."

In *Gummi Bears*, Ryan played several roles, one of which was Unwin of Dunwyn, a bully who tormented the hero but whose appearances declined as the series progressed. Ryan facetiously describes him as "a character so beloved by one and all, including me," he laughs, "that thankfully, we never see him anymore. He's just a creepy character with no redeeming values, and so nobody writes for him. But doing the ogres has been much more fun. Originally, I was Ogre Number One, Two and Three, and finally, One and Two became Gad and Zook."

A Troll in Central Park is aided by a magical flower, as voiced by Ryan.

Troll Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Don Bluth Entertainment

As Ryan's voice work increased, his partner, Phil Baron, began doing more projects with his wife. The team, Ryan says, "veered off in different directions."

Meanwhile, animators Linda Miller and Will Finn had given Ryan's demo voice tape to Don Bluth, who later hired him for *An American Tail*. Ryan would play three characters, though one role was trimmed down from star status.

"It was Sam the Apple Man," Ryan says. "Steven Spielberg wanted to have this running gag of this little mouse. He finds an apple and offers it up for sale, and then he gets a penny from it, so he goes and buys two apples for a penny, and has two apples, and by the end, he's living in a big mansion because of his chain of apple stores. It was a funny idea.

"This little character that I had done and forgotten about, Digit, got

Thumbelina Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Don Bluth Entertainment

Playing Reverend Rat and Hero the dog are more than bit parts for Ryan in *Thumbelina*.

some good laughs, so his part was built up. Every time I saw it, they seemed to be adding more from the original sessions to Digit. Finally, Sam the Apple Man and the other character I voiced, a bully cat, were reduced to one line. Digit had a nice little featured part. He was a fun character."

One of Digit's fans happened to be Max Spielberg, whose father not only produced *An American Tail* but also the next Bluth film, *The Land Before Time*. Thus, Steven Spielberg recommended Ryan for the role of Petrie, the pterodactyl.

"This was really lucky, because I had already auditioned for that part," Ryan says. "I had tried six or seven different approaches that fit the character description. Then, I was called in for another audition. I thought, 'Well, what am I going to do now? I've tried everything I could *think* of that seems to fit that character. If they don't like those, what am I doing here? I can't think of anything else.'

"So, Nancy Nayor, head of casting, said, 'Steven said he would like to hear Petrie read as Digit.'

"I was *so* relieved. That was lucky. Of course, the character's written completely differently; it was a different interpretation, but basically the same vocal placement."

For a while, co-executive producer George Lucas wanted to see what it would be like if Petrie *didn't* talk. This was tried for several months, then the voice was returned. In addition, recasting occurred throughout the production, until Ryan remained the *only* original member to make it to the final print.

Ryan can be heard in Bluth's recent *Rock-a-Doodle*, in two roles: As a duck who scoffs at the rooster Chanticleer for not making the sun rise; and Stewey the Pig, who tries to defend the farm animals against the foul fowl, the Grand Duke, and his ravenous flock of owls.

He describes Bluth as having "a great way of working in a studio. I really like working with him. He encourages ad-libs, new ideas and scenes, and we would just go for laughs, and then he has all this material. Hey, if you're going to be hiring some intelligent, funny actors, you may as well *use* them. Don't put them in straitjackets and make them unhappy and not funny."

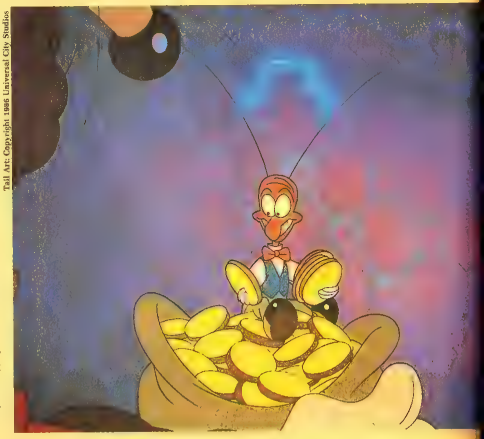
In 1987, Ryan participated in recording sessions for *The Little Mermaid*, in which the entire cast lined up for a reading of the movie.

"It was a combination radio show and Broadway audition," Ryan says. "You have the piano player there; the people who have the songs have already learned them. We all had the scripts beforehand; and we all sat around the tables with a couple of microphones and did the whole show from beginning to end, songs included. It was great.

"A month later, when we were sent back to do our scenes all by ourselves, we had a sense of who we were working off of. I knew that as a Messenger Fish (the Seahorse), I was reporting to Ken Mars as Triton, and I know Ken; I know what he sounds like and even if I didn't know him, I had already done it in person. I could work off that memory, even though he's not in the room. And, as the Old Sailor, I know the kid that I'm talking to."

Originally, Ryan had voiced three

(continued on page 66)



Tail Art: Copyright 1986 Universal City Studios

Voicing Digit in *An American Tail* led to Ryan's work as Petrie in *The Land Before Time*.

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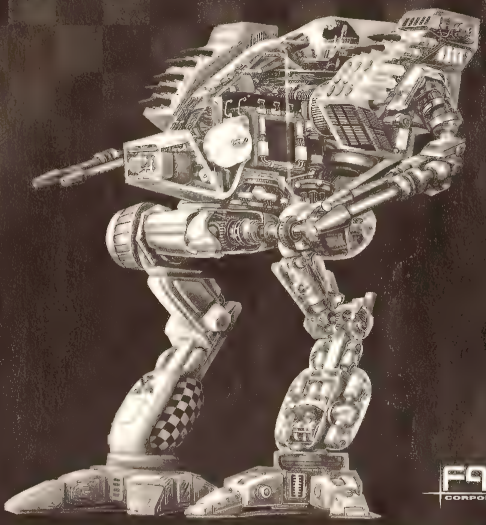

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Ryan

(continued from page 64)

Little Mermaid roles, but, he says, "two of them were whittled down to almost nothing, and the third one I kept going back and adding to [as opposed to them doing another session]. I'm told that I was the last line recorded for the picture. It was a last-minute Katzenberg addition to introduce a character by name in the picture, the Seahorse. It's a good rule of thumb to be versatile. [If I] have at least three parts, maybe I have a chance of ending up in the film. Right?

"A more recent example is for Bluth's *Thumbelina*: I did three different auditions for the Reverend Rat. Every character that I auditioned for, I did several different ways. So, I got the parts [including Hero, Thumbelina's dog], and I went in to record, and then John [Pomeroy] had some new ideas for the Reverend, and we recorded them three different ways at the session."

After *Thumbelina* comes *A Troll in Central Park*, in which Ryan voices a guard troll and a magical flower. In March 1988, Ryan added yet another career to his résumé, that of president of ASIFA/Hollywood, The International Animated Film Society. During his two-year term, he instigated a film preservation program for cartoons disintegrating on nitrate stock—which, for some cartoons, are *the only existing prints*. Ryan had ASIFA allocate funds to have selected shorts restored by UCLA's Film and Television Archives. An initial grant of $1,500 saved "Grampy's Indoor Outing," starring Betty Boop.

Aside from speaking for Toons, Will Ryan has continued writing music for them. He has introduced 400 children's songs on such shows as *Welcome to Pooh Corner*, *Dumbo's Circus*, *Gio Friends*, *Teddy Ruxpin*, *Rainbow Patch* and on records and tapes. Of those, he wrote more than 100, performed by Jonathan Winters, Mr. T, George Gobel, Anthony Michael Hall, Molly Ringwald and by cartoon greats Clarence Nash, Janet Waldo (CS #21) and Hal Smith.

Lately, Ryan's music has been recorded by the jazz label GRP, for an album of cat-oriented songs sung by Diane Schurr, Patti LaBelle and the Pointer Sisters.

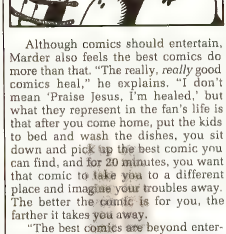
"For a guy who has only heard his songs quacked, squeaked and barked by fictitious characters like Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy and Winnie the Pooh for the last eight years," Will Ryan says, "it's especially pleasing to be recorded by *human beings*." CS

Marder

(continued from page 16)

appeared in a three-page sequence in a peyote vision in Tim Truman's *Scout*.)

"Marv Wolfman and I worked out the *Total Eclipse* plot. During this infinite crisis, both sides are equally matched, and this little guy comes and pulls the plug out of this giant machine, tipping the balance of power—and it was Beanish! The challenge was to work it into the continuity of my own book, to not disappoint my own fans or blow everything I've been building up for all those years, and it was tremendous work. There was a lot of unhappiness before it came out, but I pulled it off and gained quite a few readers. I would do it again in a second if I could come up with the right concept, though I wouldn't bring outside characters into my book."



Although comics should entertain, Marder also feels the best comics do more than that. "The really, *really* good comics heal," he explains. "I don't mean 'Praise Jesus, I'm healed,' but what they represent in the fan's life is that after you come home, put the kids to bed and wash the dishes, you sit down and pick up the best comic you can find, and for 20 minutes, you want that comic to take you to a different place and imagine your troubles away. The better the comic is for you, the farther it takes you away.

"The best comics are beyond entertainment. I have no idea what *Beanworld* does for somebody else, because I create it. I know what *Cerebus*, *Flaming Carrot* and *Eight-Ball* do for me—those comics are borderline healing. That's a function of art—it takes you to a different place."

Larry Marder says that after all these years, he still likes beans. Part of the reason, he explains, could even go back to his birth.

"When I was born, my head was kind of lop-sided. In my Baby Book, my Mom wrote, 'His head is shaped like a lima bean.' Of course, it straightened out, but even in my Baby Book, where it says 'Shape of Head,' there's a perfect little bean-shaped drawing!" he says.

"I still love eating beans—they're like my personal totem." CS

Grant

(continued from page 51)

As if he wasn't doing enough, Grant is also writing the comics adaptation of *RoboCop 3*. "Adapting films is the writer's equivalent of inking. Pencillers put a lot of work into it, but inkers can talk on the phone while their hand moves. All the hard work has been done for me, so all I have to do is break it down into allotted space.

"I'm doing a *RoboCop* mini-series [*Mortal Coils*] as well. The OCP offices are raided, and RoboCop follows the thief to Denver. He gets in trouble because he wasn't built for that terrain. It's *Coogan's Bluff* backwards.

"Also, I'm supposed to do *His Name is Savage* for Gil Kane," he continues. "Gil loved *Badlands* and called me. He was my favorite artist when I was growing up, with his *Johnny Thunder* and *Green Lantern* stuff. It's a great honor to work with him."

Grant has also "done a bunch of *Deathstroke, The Terminator* and two *Legends of the Dark Knight* arcs, one with Mike Zeck, the other with Shawn McManus. Batman fights cops in one and goes to prison in the other."

Does the author ever co-plot with artists on his detailed stories? "No," he answers frankly. "Mike [Zeck] and I will talk things over very roughly, then I'll go off and plot it. I usually don't know who my artist will be when I write. I don't like discussing stories with others because the more people you discuss them with, the murkier they get. My idea of a story is to give an editor two lines of what it's about, then go off and write the thing."

He has also dabbled in Hollywood. "I did a story for *The Flash* TV show that everybody loved, but when it was sent to the network, they said, 'Our audience won't understand it.' When the network says no, it's dead. Basically, Barry Allen wakes up in the hospital, where he has been since he got hit by the lightning and chemicals, his brother's alive and he's *not* the Flash."

Grant's female ninja was also slated for Tinseltown. "I've just recovered *Whisper* from First Comics. There was going to be a movie version starring Vanity a long time ago, but it fell through. Atlantic Releasing wanted to do it, but went belly-up before we signed contracts."

Despite his busy schedule, the writer enjoys his profession. "I have no problem writing comics characters because they're all wonderful in their own way, as long as the characters don't fall flat. Well, it *is* hard to come up with death traps," Steven Grant acknowledges, "but that's a hazard of the comics writing business." CS

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COMICS screen

All of these upcoming projects are live-action unless specified. Those listed are new or updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** Legend: S: script D: director P: producer C: creator AN: animated LA: live-action. Syn: syndicated HB: Hanna-Barbera/Nel Nelvana. MWS: Murakami Wolf Swenson: RB Rankin-Bass: WD: Disney: WB: Warner Bros.: PP: Paramount: U: Universal: DH: Dark Horse: L: Largo: Col: Columbia: An: Amblin: FF: Funnybook Films. **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016 (info as of 10/31/92)

❑ **Addams Family.** Sequel. PP. Being scripted. AN series. ABC. HB.

Ace of the Newsreels. Film. S: Pam Hickey, Dennys McCoy.

The Airtight Garage. AN. S: Randy Lofficier.

❑ **Aladdin.** AN film. WD. P/D/S: Ron Clements, John Musker. Out. (see article)

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

ALIENS vs. Predator. Film. DH/Fox.

❑ **The American.** Film. DH/L.

Animaniacs. AN syn TV. WB/Am. Fall '93.

Annie. Film. *Annie & the Castle of Terror.* D: Lewis Gilbert. Col. To film spring '93. Stage musical sequel. *Annie Warbucks.* Touring. C: Charnin, Meehan, Strouse.

Archie. LA Film. S: N. & D. Ephron. DIC.

Baby Huey. AN short. U. S: Bill Kopp.

Bad Baby. AN TV. Imag.

Barbarella. LA film. Nel.

Barbie. Film. Abrams/Gentile Ent. & Mattel.

❑ **Batman.** AN series. Fox. (see article)

Beyond the Yellow Dragons. AN film. Fox/HB. '93.

The Black Cat. Film. Sean Young, D: John Paragon.

Blackhawk. Film. Am. S: Dan Aykroyd.

Blankman. Film. C: Damon & Keenan Ivory Wayans.

Black Panther. Film. W/Wesley Snipes. D: John Singleton. P: Brad Weston, Bob Beitcher. Col.

Blade. Film.

Blondie. Film. WB. P: Joel Silver.

Bonkers D. Bobcat. Syn AN series. WD. Fall '93.

Boogiemanland. AN. Fox.

Brave Little Toaster. AN film sequel. Hyperion.

Bugs Bunny. *Termite Terrace.* LA/AN film.

Casper. Film. Am. U.

Chicken Man. AN spoof.

Cobalt 60. AN film.

Concrete. Film. S: (D) L. Wilson, C. Thompson. P: Tim Burton, DH.

The Crow. Film. S: John Shirley. D: Alex Proyas. P: Ed Pressman. W/Brandon Lee.

Crusader Rabbit. New AN series. In development. Fox.

Cyberpunk. Film. S: Steve Roberts. Imagination Factory.

Dan Dare. TV series.

Danger Squad. Film. P/D: Leo Fong. W/D: P.R. Cable.

❑ **Deadworld.** Film. Dementia Pictures.

Deathlok. Film.

Dennis the Menace. Film. P/S: John Hughes. D: Nick Castle. W/Walter Matthau, Chris Lloyd, Lea Thompson. WB. Summer '93. *Dennis the Menace.* LA TV series. WB. Fall '93.

Dick Tracy. Film. Touchstone. D: Warren Beatty. W/Beatty, Madonna, Al Pacino, Glenne Headly, Dustin Hoffman, Paul Sorvino, Charlie Korsmo, James Caan, Mandy Patinkin, R.G. Armstrong, Seymour Cassel, William Forsythe, Estelle Parsons, Kathy Bates, Dick Van Dyke, Henry Silva, Michael J. Pollard, Frank Campanella, Ed O'Ross, Ed Nelson, Charles Durning, Catherine O'Hara, Jim Wilkey, Paul Williams, Michael Berryman, Mandy Patinkin, Michael Jeter, Kimberly Cullum, Allen Garfield, Michael Gambon, Mary Woronov, Michael Caine, Dick Beals, Bert Remsen, Ian Wolfe, Jack Wallace, Jason Beghe, Jason Alexander, Joe Flaherty, Dick Miller

Radio Boy. AN. RB.
Red Sonja. TV. Lancit.
Reid Fleming. Film. S: creator David Boswell. P: M. Weisman, J. Loeb II.
Richie Rich. Film. P: J. Silver, J. Davis. S: Neil Tolkin.
RoboCop 3. S: Frank Miller & Fred Dekker (D). Finished.
Roger Rabbit. New AN short "Trail Mix Up." WD.
Rupert the Bear. AN. Nel.
❑ **The Saint.** Film. S: Terry Hayes. D: Philip Noyce. P: Robert Evans. PP.
Sandman. Film.
Scooby Doo. Film. WB.
Secret Agent X-9. AN film.
Sgt. Kabukiman. AN series. Troma. DIC.
Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver, Bob Zemeckis. WB.
The Shadow. Film. S: David Koepp. P: Martin Bregman. U.
The Silver Surfer. Film. EP: Stan Lee. Constantin Film.
Speed Racer. AN TV series. MWS. Fall '93 bow.
Spider-Man. Film. D: Jim Cameron. Studio TBA. Stage musical. S & lyrics: B. Harman. Music: K. Herrmann. EXP: Stan Lee. D: J. Nash. J. Calamari.
Starwatcher. AN film. P: Videosystem. S: Moebius & J. Fryszman. D: Moebius, Keith Ingham. PP.
Superman. *Superman: The New Movie.* S: Mark Jones & Cary Bates.
❑ **Super Mario Bros.** LA film. S: Barry Morrow. D: Rocky Morton, Annabel Jankel. Cast: Bob Hoskins, Dennis Hopper, Fisher Stevens, Samantha Mathis. Summer '93.
Tales from the Hart. TV. P: Aaron Spelling.
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. LA sequel. March '93. S/D: Stuart T. Gillard. W/Paige Turco, Elias Koteas. AN series. CBS, Syn.
Terry & the Pirates. TV. P: Ben Melniker, Michael Uslan.
Time Cop. Film. D: Sam Raimi. DH/L.
Tom & Jerry. AN film. P/D: Phil Roman. Spring '93.
Toxic Crusaders. LA film. Troma/New Line. Summer '93.
Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox/FF. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones. P: M. Pepler, N. Tabachnick.
Valentina. TV series. Dementra Hampton. Reteitalia.
Vampirella. Film. S/D: Jim Wynorski.
V for Vendetta. Film. WB.
Watchmen. Film.
We're Back. AN film. Am/U. Fall '93.
Why I Hate Saturn. TV.
Wild Cards. Film. Disney. S: George R.R. Martin. P: Michael Engelberg.
❑ **Wild Palms.** TV series; six episodes. C: Bruce Wagner. Ixtlan.
❑ **Wolff & Byrd.** TV. Lorimar. P: Joel Simon, Bill Todman Jr. EP/D: Joe Dante. For Fox.
❑ **Zen.** Film. AN series. Ruby-Spears.
Zorro. Film. D: Steven Spielberg. Zorro: Andy Garcia? S: Nancy Larson. TriStar. (see item). LA TV series. F. Chan. AN TV series. In development. Nel. Broadway musical. P: Fox, Nederlander.

Zorro Rides

Will Andy Garcia ride as Zorro?

Jennifer & Photo: Merrick Morton/Copyright 1992 Paramount Pictures

Andy Garcia thinks playing Zorro in the currently-in-development Steven Spielberg-directed movie sounds good to him. But the actor, considered by many as the favorite to don cape and mask for this TriStar film, points out that *nothing* is set in stone.

"Steven and I have talked, but there's nothing definite yet," says Garcia, who recently played an obsessed cop in the thriller *Jennifer 8*. "I haven't seen a script [now being written by Nancy Larson], and when I see the script, I might not relate to their take on the character. So, whether I do it depends on the script at this point."

Script aside, Garcia does have notions on how he would play Johnston McCulley's Robin Hood of the Old West.

"Playing to the duality of the character is the most important thing for me with this character," he says. "The idea of playing this fop and then suddenly becoming Zorro and taking on completely different characteristics is the biggest challenge I see. I hope that's what's in the script. If not, then Zorro would just be this guy who runs around in a mask and cape. What's behind the mind of his alter-ego is what's important to me."

—*Marc Shapiro*

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